

# The Apostles' Creed

LESSON  
FIVE

The Church  
Discussion Forum



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# The Apostles' Creed

## Lesson Five: The Church

### Discussion Forum

With

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Rev. Mike Glodo

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Dr. Dennis Johnson

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Dr. John McKinley

Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

Dr. John Oswalt

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Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Dr. Derek Thomas

Dr. Simon Vibert

Dr. Peter Walker

Dr. Willie Wells

Dr. Stephen Wellum

Dr. Donald Whitney

### Question 1:

#### What is the church?

**Among the articles of faith affirmed by the Apostles' Creed is belief in the church. But there are many different conceptions of the church among Christians today. Is the church a group of people? Or a building? Or a historical institution? Or is it more complicated than any of those concepts? What is the church?**

#### **Dr. Saul Cruz (translation)**

The church is the community of believers, the body of Christ. The church is the new humanity whom God has called out of a sinful world to live with him forever and to represent him. The church is also the way by which God unleashes his power and his might to transform the world. The church is the living testimony to Christ's sacrifice that can be seen working itself in the life of people as they fight to keep holy lives, to distance themselves from sin, and at the same time, learn to love and serve their fellow man. The church is also the way by which we communicate the gospel in a clear and bold way to the world.

#### **Mr. Daniel Fajfr**

The name, "church," has its origin in a Greek word, *ekklesia*. Originally, it is not a Christian word. Generally, it means "community," "fellowship," which is gathering for a certain reason. In the New Testament, *ekklesia* represents about four possibilities. It's a universal church, general church of all saints. We read it in Ephesians 1, "He put all things under his feet," and has made him the "head over all things" for the church. Second, it's a local church, means congregational fellowship in the town. We read in Romans 16, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae." Third, worship, assembly of the saints. The church is also Sunday morning assembly. We read in 1 Corinthians 14, "[For in the first place], when you assemble [as a church]..." And the fourth, home groups. Paul greets Priscilla and Aquila: and greet them ... and "greet also the church in their house."

**Rev. Mike Glodo**

I think a good starting point is remembering that the word for church in the Greek New Testament, *ekklesia*, is really the Greek term used to convey the Old Testament idea of the assembly of God's people, the *qahal*, so that the New Testament church is in continuity with the Old Testament assembly, the assembly of God's people.

**Dr. Derek Thomas**

When Paul at the end of Galatians, Galatians 6:16, says as his farewell to the churches in Galatia, "Peace be ... upon the Israel of God," you can make that statement to mean Paul is saying greetings to fellow Jews in Galatia, converted Jews, Christian Jews. Now that hardly seems plausible in a letter in which the distinctive note has been Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile." Why would he, after recording his public outburst with Peter in Antioch, where Peter had refused to eat his pork sandwiches because the heavyweights from Jerusalem had come to Antioch, and he went and sat and ate kosher food with his Jewish buddies, and Paul dressed him down to the face, why would Paul then at the end of this letter say, oh, and by the way, peace be to my Jewish friends? No, when he says, "Peace be upon the Israel of God," he's making the same point. The Israel of God consists of Jews and Gentiles. The church of the Old Testament is the church of the New Testament, or perhaps more pointedly, the church of the New Testament is but the flowering of the church of the Old Testament. There is one administration of a covenant of grace that operates from Abraham right through to Paul, and right through to you and me, today. There is no distinctive Jewish church and Gentile church or Jewish kingdom and Gentile church. There is but one church, the body of Christ.

**Question 2:****Why is it helpful to consider the church's Old Testament background?**

**Scripture indicates that there is great continuity between the Old Testament assembly of God's people and the New Testament church. But what practical difference does this continuity make? Why is it helpful to consider the church's Old Testament background?**

**Dr. John Oswalt**

The Old Testament background of the church is essential because the whole concept of God's called-out people comes from the Old Testament. It's fascinating that the church fathers never seriously considered the idea that somehow the Christian church is separate from its Old Testament roots. When the "saintly" Marcion proposed that the Old Testament be discarded, it did not take the church very long to declare him a heretic. Fundamentally, I think the point is summed up in Paul's frequent description of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Savior. He is indeed Yahweh, and of course that gets masked in English when we say, "Jesus is Lord." Well, to the Jew, they understood what that was saying: "Jesus is Yahweh." So, who is this God who comes in the form of a baby? He is, incredibly, the Old Testament Yahweh. He is the one who comes to satisfy, in himself, his own justice. If we don't

know the Old Testament as a church, we are going to miss God's transcendence, we're going to miss his justice, we're going to miss his holiness, and we're going to reduce God to a little useful God who exists for us. So it's absolutely essential that the New Testament church be founded upon the truths of the Old Testament.

**Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.**

To try to be a Christian, and to understand what it means to be the church without the Old Testament, is to try to enter the story at a decisive turning point and act as if nothing had come before. But actually, you can't understand the new covenant without reference to the old. You can't understand what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah until you understand Israel's longing for the promised Son of David who would come to be Israel's king. We can't understand the fulfillment of prophecy in the New Testament. Matthew repeatedly says, these things happened in order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. Well, if we don't understand the Old Testament then we can't possibly understand what is being fulfilled here right before our eyes. You know, the New Testament tells us — for instance in the prologue of the Gospel of John — that Jesus is the divine Logos for whom the worlds were created, but it doesn't give us a sequence of creation. It doesn't tell us the things we need to know even that come before the gospel. And it doesn't tell us something else that is just really, really important, is central to the gospel. It's impossible to understand the gospel of Christ without Genesis 3, or not understanding human fallenness, sinfulness, and the consequences of human sin. Without that we can't possibly understand what it meant for Jesus to come and save sinners. The Old Testament is absolutely necessary, not just so that we can know who our ancestors are, but so that we can know who we are.

**Question 3:**

**How similar were God's purposes for the Old Testament church and the New Testament church?**

**Besides the continuities of identity we find between the Old and New Testament churches, there are also important continuities between their purposes. In both Testaments, God regularly used his church to advance his kingdom. And his plans never failed. The New Testament church is not God's contingency plan. It's the natural development of the Old Testament assembly. And one way to verify this is to look at God's purposes for his people in both ages. So, how similar were God's purposes for the Old Testament church and the New Testament church?**

**Dr. Stephen Wellum**

When we speak of the church in the New Testament it's important to realize that it's not totally brand new; it's rooted back in terms of God's redemptive purposes with Israel of old. God has one people, one plan, that from all eternity he has had, and then he has worked it out in redemptive history and unfolded it before us. In the Old Testament, with the nation of Israel, they were the chosen people of God. They were chosen as an ethnic nation for a number of reasons, primarily to bring about the

coming of the Messiah, to bring about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ who would, in terms of fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, would bring blessing to both Jew and Gentile in terms of the whole world. Within the nation of Israel as that ethnic nation, there were believers within that nation. Not all Israel is Israel. Paul makes that very clear in Romans 9, so that just because one was an ethnic Jew, an ethnic Israelite, a covenant member in that way, did not guarantee that they had saving faith. You could think of, you could have simultaneously Elijah and Ahab, and you got a great contrast there with those two individuals. The believing remnant from the Old Testament are the people of God. Those were the ones who, we would say, experience salvation the way that we're speaking about it in terms of the New Testament. The rest of the people would have had incredible privileges, blessings. They would have had redemption. You think of, at the exodus, many of them were redeemed from Egypt, brought out of slavery. That didn't necessarily mean, though, that they had the full salvation sense of redemption.

And so, only those "by grace ... through faith" in the Old Testament were the true people of God. That then carries over in continuity to the church. The church is comprised of those, by grace through faith, who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, believed in God's promises. The Old Testament believer believed in God's promises, covenantal promises that looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ. The church now, in light of his coming, believes in him with greater understanding and greater clarity, but the same promise, the same Redeemer, we are all one in that. We are one people of God throughout the ages. Yet, obviously in the New Testament there are some differences. There's the fulfillment that has taken place. There's the greater understanding. There is the whole community that are comprised of those who are regenerated and those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But we must not minimize the continuity, the sameness of the people of God of old, of the church of the new. We must not so separate Israel and the true people of God in terms of believers in the old from the church. And remembering that there is one people, one plan, and that is still being worked out. And in the new heaven, new earth, when Christ comes again and consummates all things, both Jew and Gentile, those who are believers in the Old Testament, the true church comprised of Jew, Gentile, and all the nations, are those that will bow before the knee of the Lord Jesus Christ and give him praises for all eternity.

**Dr. Dennis Johnson**

It's a great thing to think about the continuity of the purpose of the Old Testament church and the New Testament church because it really stems, I would argue, particularly from God's covenant with Abraham. In Genesis 12, God promises Abraham not only Abraham, who at that point, of course, was childless that he would have a seed that could not be counted, but that through Abraham the nations would be blessed. And we see that working its way out throughout the Old Testament. Israel is called to be a people who are distinctive to the Lord and yet also a people who represent the Lord and his reign among the nations. They are called the kingdom of priests as they gather at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19. And priests stand in the presence of God and serve him, but they also have the role of standing on behalf of others and

interceding for others. As Aaron and his sons did for Israel, so Israel is to do for the nations. Of course, we know that Israel in so many ways failed, as we would have failed, to be that kingdom of priests, to be that avenue through which blessings would flow from God through Israel to all the nations. But Jesus is the ultimate seed of Abraham, and now in Christ the new covenant church is both the recipient of blessing through Jesus, the seed of Abraham, and avenue of blessing among the nations.

So we stand as Israel stood in the presence of God to bring him glory, to adore him, to admire him, to speak of his marvelous deeds. And God speaks of Israel's calling in Isaiah 43 as the people whom he formed for himself to declare his praises. Peter picks up that very terminology in 1 Peter 2 and talks about our being called out of darkness into light that we might speak the excellences of the one who called us in Christ. Israel, we read, is called to be the Lord's witnesses among the nations, to declare what he's done. That he alone is the Savior and the God — and the true and the living God. And we read now in the New Testament, in the book of Acts, that the apostles, and really in their ministry the church, is called to be witnesses to the mighty deeds of God among the nations. So there is a great deal of continuity of purpose as we move from what Israel was called to be, sadly too often failed to be, what Christ has been perfectly as the perfect worshiper of the Father on our behalf and the perfect witness to the nations on our behalf and now what he's making us. We're still imperfect, but by the grace of the Holy Spirit we can worship in the presence of the Father and we can bear witness to the nations. So the blessing promised to Abraham is flowing to the nations through Christ, from Christ, through the witness and the worship of his church.

#### **Question 4:**

#### **How is the Old Testament church's relationship to Christ similar to the New Testament church's relationship to Christ?**

**The Bible tells one main story — the story of redemption — and it's helpful to understand that this redemption began long before the modern church was established. Of course, Old Testament believers couldn't have known Jesus in the same way that New Testament believers do. But they still depended on him in important ways. How is the Old Testament church's relationship to Christ similar to the New Testament church's relationship to Christ?**

#### **Dr. David Bauer**

The way in which the Old Testament's relationship to Christ relates to the New Testament church's relationship to Christ, I think, is very well explained by the great Basel Swiss, the great Basel New Testament theologian Oscar Cullmann. A number of works of his such as *Christ and Time* or *Salvation in History*, he argues that, as far as the Bible is concerned — the whole Canon of the Bible is concerned — Jesus Christ stands at the center of time. He views in terms of a funnel down to Christ, and then a funnel out from Christ with Christ as the center, that salvation history — the history of God's dealings in the Bible — begin with God being equally concerned



with the whole of the cosmos. You have this, for example, in the beginning chapters of Genesis, but then the focus narrows to one nation, Israel, and even within the Old Testament it narrows even further to the notion of the righteous remnant in Israel. And finally, all the promises of God, all of God's dealings with his people, Israel, focus upon one man, Jesus Christ. Paul could say in 2 Corinthians 1:20, "all the promises of God find their Yes in him." As far as Cullmann is concerned Jesus is really, in a sense, the embodiment of Israel of the Old Testament people of God so that everything was moving towards him. In the New Testament everything moves, uh, from him, so that you have again a broadening out from the one man, Jesus Christ, to the church, and finally, of course, in the consummation God will once again take control of the cosmos in ways that have not, up to this point, become clear so that the New Testament church relates to the Old Testament people of God through Jesus Christ.

That is the basis of the continuity between New Testament faith, New Testament church, and what God did for his people, with his people, Israel, prior to Christ. And that means, really then, that Israel's history becomes our own. And this understanding of the relationship between the New Testament church and the Old Testament people of God is extremely important for a Christian's self-identity, because it does mean, of course, that what we can know or should know about Christ, the truth about Christ, is anticipated in God's dealings with his people Israel there. And, therefore, there are aspects about Christ that we would not know, would not be able to embrace, if it were not for the Old Testament giving, bringing its witness to Christ in that way. So, you can talk about a kind of continuity between the experience of the people of God in the Old Testament and the experience of the people of God today. And now that means to some extent, in some ways, Old Testament saints actually did participate in faith in Christ without really knowing it fully, or knowing fully, at least, what was involved, and actually experienced salvation in Christ even though they lived before Christ.

There is a passage in the ninth chapter of Hebrews that talks about a death having occurred — the death of Christ — which redeems us from transgressions committed under the first covenant, which suggests, really, which means that those who participated in Israel's faith in the first covenant actually find, or will find, their salvation in the atoning work — including death of course — the atoning work and death of Christ. Looking at it from another way, of course, Paul can talk about Abraham, for example, having the same kind of faith that we have. By which he meant not simply that it was the same faith that we have in formal terms. That is to say that it had the same formal characteristics, that Abraham's faith in God had the same formal characteristics as our faith in God through Christ, but actually Paul goes so far as to suggest that although he didn't know it and would not have been able to articulate it this way, Abraham had faith in Christ. Because, insofar as Abraham had faith in the promise of God, and insofar — again as Paul said — "all of the promises of God find their Yes in him," really, Christ is anticipated in the promise. In other words, insofar as Abraham had faith in the promise of God, and insofar as Christ is God's promise, ultimately, Abraham had faith in Christ. Still, where Abraham and

others in the Old Testament lived in terms of God's progress of redemption meant that their experience of salvation was limited in relation to our own.

### **Question 5:** **Why do Christians need the church?**

**In both the Old and New Testaments, the church was an essential part of God's plan for salvation. Sadly, many modern Christians tend to avoid the church. It's true that we're justified by faith alone in Christ alone. But there are many aspects of redeemed life that require our participation in a local congregation. So, what are some of these aspects? Why do Christians need the church?**

#### **Rev. Mike Glodo**

Well, we should understand that it's God purpose to gather us into Jesus' church. There are things God does for us in the church that he doesn't do for us outside the church. We have the Lord's Supper, which Jesus instituted. We have baptism, which marks the entrance into the assembly, or the church of Jesus. We also have to appreciate, letting Scripture interpret Scripture, that the church is the apple of Jesus' eye. The Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 5 that he loved her and gave himself up for her. And it's Jesus' desire to gather his people into a community. And this is really a present important reality for us, that Jesus himself was the embodiment of the kingdom, but as he gathers us into him, he also gathers us into a fellowship with one another. It's not just an elective or voluntary organization where we can get things done better, but we reflect the unity of Jesus when we unite together in his church and come under his shepherds because he did leave us, first of all, apostles. He told Peter, you are the rock on which I will build my church. Jesus is the cornerstone; the apostles are the foundation stones, we're told in places like Ephesians 4. And we're all being built into a spiritual house or a temple for God as 1 Peter 2 reminds us. And so we're not just followers of Jesus individually, but we are the embodiment of this new creation that Jesus has brought in by his resurrection from the dead and by his giving of the Spirit to us as his new temple, so that we are the presence of the kingdom of God in the church where people can find mercy and forgiveness, and they can find provision when they lack, and they can find companionship when they are lonely. So the church really is a foretaste of the new heavens and earth, which will one day be visible throughout the whole creation.

### **Question 6:** **What is God's holiness?**

**The church has many characteristics that it derives from God and that reflect his character. For example, the Apostles' Creed mentions that the church is "holy." But how do we know what that means? Well, since the church derives its holiness from God, one way to understand this characteristic is to look at the holiness of God. So then, what is God's holiness?**

**Dr. K. Erik Thoennes**

The holiness of God means that he is uniquely and supremely superior to and above everything in creation. It also has a moral element, which means that God is completely separate from sin and evil.

**Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.**

You know, holiness is really the first thing said about God, especially in the Old Testament, how he reveals himself. He is the Holy One of Israel. The most important part about being holy is that he is separate from who we are. He is distinct from us. And the first way in which most of us can most clearly understand how he's distinct from us is morally. What it means for God to be holy is that he is absolutely perfect. And when we think of imperfection, well, the most clear imperfection to us are the moral imperfections of our lives. God's holiness actually explains just about everything about who he is, but when we think most essentially about what we have to know it means for God to be holy, it means that there is no sin in him. There is no temptation to do evil in him. There is no shadow of turning in him. He is absolutely morally perfect. He is quintessentially, totally, in an undiluted way, holy. The most important thing we can know about him is that he is holy. And to understand that God is holy, the most important thing we can know about ourselves is that we are sinners desperately in need of his forgiveness. What did Isaiah say? He said, "Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." When we understand God's holiness, everything falls into place, when we understand that the one true and living God is first defined by the fact that he is perfect.

**Dr. John Oswalt**

In many ways the idea of God's holiness is fundamental to his nature, to our understanding of that nature. The word "holy" is not very frequent in ancient Near Eastern literature. It occurs a fair number of times, most of those though relating to things that belong to gods and not talking about the gods themselves. But fundamentally, it defines that which is extraordinary, that which is somehow outside of our ordinary experience, and in the ancient Near Eastern literature it has no moral quality at all. It couldn't because the unclean gods are holy; the clean gods are holy. The good gods are holy; the bad gods are holy. They're extraordinary; they're other. What happens in the Old Testament is that this word becomes dramatically significant for describing God. It occurs more than 800 times in the Old Testament, and it refers then to God's absolute otherness. What the Old Testament then says is, really there's only one being in the universe who is other. Those gods, they're not other — the wind, the rain, the storm. And then you make your god out of a block of wood and plate it with gold. How could you call that other? No, no, we have met a God, though, who is not the wind, who's not the rain, who's not the sun. He is other. And there's only one truly other. That means you can talk about holy character now. His character.

It's fascinating to think that it's theoretically possible holiness could mean brutality, if the one holy one was a brute. If the one holy one was cruel, holiness would mean cruelty. But, praise God, the one Holy One is love; he is truth; he is right; he is pure. And so then, God's holiness not merely describes his essence — he is the “other one” — but it also describes his character. And that great good news, then, is this One who is the other with whom all of us have to do and whom all of us will one day stand before, this other is characterized by nature like this. So, to understand that God's holiness is expressed in these ways, then begins to help us understand what he means when he says, you must be holy as I am holy. He doesn't mean we've got to become gods, that we've got to become transcendent, but he does mean, I want you to share my character, and how the world needs character like his.

### **Question 7:**

#### **What does the church's identity as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation imply about its modern obligations?**

**When the Apostles' Creed speaks of the “holy, catholic church,” it's primarily focused on the church as a universal organization rather than as individuals. And this emphasis is drawn directly from Scripture, which identifies the church as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” But what does the church's identity as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation imply about its modern obligations?**

#### **Dr. Peter Walker**

The book of 1 Peter in the New Testament describes all believers as being priests, or it talks about the priesthood of all believers. It's a great phrase, and it's picking up a phrase from Exodus 19 where the ancient nation of Israel is described as, “You shall be,” says God, “a nation of priests.” I think that what that's saying is that, just as Israel was meant to be the place which if you looked at Israel you saw something of the character of God, priests were meant to, kind of, reflect the character of God. So now, all Christian believers are those who, if you look at them, you're meant to see some of the character of God. It's in that sense that we're all priests; we are part of the priesthood of believers reflecting God's glory to the wider world.

#### **Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.**

One of the most important things to know about the Bible's view of human beings is this: human beings were made to serve or to minister to God. I know we talk a lot about serving each other and ministering to each other, but from the beginning all the way to the end, the primary purpose of human beings is to minister or serve God. You can go all the way back to Genesis 2:15 where God said about Adam in the Garden that he was to work it and to take care of it. “To work it and to take care of it” was language that's used in the book of Numbers to refer to what priests and Levites do within the tabernacle. And so from the very beginning when God put humanity in his temple garden, the Garden of Eden, he commanded them to function as priests, in fact, royal priests. And as you go through the Bible, you discover that that's always been the case, that this is always the ideal for human beings, but that in the Old

Testament and then all the way up until the second coming of Christ, this activity takes place in relatively small areas, small pieces here and there. I mean, for example, it started off with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which was just one little piece of the earth. And you go on with Israel when they establish a tabernacle and they establish the temple in Jerusalem still the ministering and serving of God by priests is something that takes place in a “holy” place or a “sanctified” place, but nevertheless, this is what human beings were supposed to do. It’s why they were designed, why they were put on the planet.

But the picture of the new world, when God has sanctified the entire earth and made it all his temple, made it all his holy presence, then this is going to be the job, a priestly job, a royal priestly job for every single human being that lives in that new world. You know, God told Israel in Exodus 19 that God had chosen them to be a royal priesthood, an imperial priesthood, as it were. And that language in Exodus 19 is used by Peter in the New Testament to refer to the church. And so, this is the perspective that we’re to have, not only on ancient Israel as a whole, but also on Christians as a whole, that we are a royal priesthood, a chosen people, a royal imperial priesthood. Now, I know in many respects that sounds strange because when we think of priests what we normally think of is that priests do just a very limited number of things; they offer sacrifices, they pray, occasionally they sing, maybe they blow trumpets and are in choirs and things like that. But in reality, what the Bible is saying is that every legitimate, God-ordained activity on the earth, from the beginning to the end, has been an act of royal priesthood for those who serve God, and they do it in limited ways in the Old Testament, and even in the life of Jesus and in the Christian church today, but in the end, all of it will be such.

And in fact, the Bible portrays the creation in many respects, in many places, as if it is God’s temple. And, if you can imagine it, God’s throne, Isaiah says, is in heaven and his footstool is on the earth, and around his footstool — of course this is talking about the ark of the covenant — around his footstool is a holy place where the high priest and the Levites, the special priests of the nation of Israel, serve him. And they do this by decorating, they do this by making sure sacrifices are ready, that plants are grown in the right way, that it’s a beautiful place, a wondrous place for God’s environment, and keeping evil and unclean things out. This is the kinds of things they do, so all their activity is like that. But the Bible says that the whole floor of the earth, the whole earth is the floor of God’s temple, and what God is doing is he’s spreading out his influence, spreading out his holiness from that one little spot, the Garden of Eden in the beginning, later on the tabernacle as it moved, but then finally the temple as it was established. He’s now moving out and cleaning the whole floor of his great palace, which is the earth. And this takes place through Israel to some extent. Of course, they failed and misery came from that. And Christ comes, and now he has set us on this task of cleaning the entire floor, and the way we do that is by serving God in every single area of life as an act of worship to him. It’s not as if we have just some things that we do that are ministries to God, service of worship to him, and then other things that we do for ourselves or for no good reason at all. Rather, every single thing that we do as Christians is to be done heartily as unto the Lord because it is unto the

Lord; whether it's your six days of work, whether it's sleeping, whether it's raising your children. Whatever it is, it is an activity of a royal priest because our job is to move the holiness of God throughout the world in anticipation of the new world to come when everyone who is left will live in this wondrously cleaned, holy, sanctified earth, and they will serve God forever as his royal priests.

### **Question 8:**

#### **What is the proper role of ordained ministers in the church?**

**Since Scripture calls the entire church to serve as a holy nation of royal priests, it often causes Christians to wonder about the role of modern ministers. After all, if every member of the church now ministers to God, what's left for pastors to do? What is the proper role of ordained ministers in the church?**

#### **Dr. Stephen Wellum**

It's important to think through the relationship between the entire church as a priesthood of all believers, and then what would be the point of having pastors? I mean, if we're all priests, why do we need them? As we work from the Old Testament to the New — the old covenant to the new — the nation of Israel was viewed as a priesthood. They had priests who represented them, but they were to also represent God to the entire world. As you work to the New Testament, the fulfillment of the priesthood is Christ as our great high priest. He is the one who offers himself for us. He is the one who takes our place. He is the one who intercedes for us. He then, by virtue of his work, makes us now priests. He brings us back to God. We then intercede for the world; we carry out our priestly work in terms of our restoration of what it was meant to be as his image bearers, of carrying out the cultural mandate before us. The whole body of Christ are priests, yet that doesn't mean then that we don't have teachers, leaders in the church. All of us are priests; all of us know God. Yet there are certain gifts that are given out to the church that are not all the same. Christ, as he ascends, pours out gifts of leaders, pastors, teachers. Even though all of us know God directly, intercede directly before him through our Lord Jesus Christ's priestly work, yet there are those who in the body serve different purposes, and pastors have that unique role of leading and teaching and equipping the people of God, and they're gifted in that way as fellow priests, but given a special role and a unique leadership role in the church.

#### **Dr. Peter Walker**

There is a need, as indeed in any organization, to have people who are in charge, and God is not a God who encourages sheer chaos, and any community needs to have good order. And therefore it is appropriate — and we see this in the New Testament — for people to be elevated, if that's the right word, to positions of authority, that we're called to be submissive to those who are in authority. If that's true in the pagan world, how much more in the Christian church we should be submissive to those that have leadership or who are over us in the Lord, to use a phrase from the New Testament. What, therefore, is the role of these people? Well, to serve their people.

We're called to be servant leaders, but also to be, well, teachers. I think that's a key role. If actually Christ rules his church by his Word, then those who are called to be leaders in his church must, as it were, exercise Christ's rule of his church by the same means, which is, by his Word, which then shows you the importance in the New Testament of people being called to be teachers. It's those who have an ability to teach who are meant to be those who lead. There's also a role, obviously, for pastoral care, for being nice to people and caring for the flock, those who are Jesus' sheep. I would put the primary role as that of being a teacher, ruling God's people by his Word.

### **Question 9:**

#### **How can pastors adapt their teaching to audiences that include unbelievers?**

**The church as a whole is holy to God. But people are drawn to the church for many reasons, and not everyone who comes to church is a believer. And this sometimes creates difficulties for pastors. How can pastors adapt their teaching to audiences that include unbelievers?**

#### **Dr. Dennis Johnson**

Pastors and teachers can learn to adapt their teaching to the needs of different audiences, particular audiences, I think especially by paying attention to the sermons in the book of Acts. As the apostles preach, some of the sermons that they preach are in the context in which they expect a congregation, an audience, to recognize the Old Testament Scriptures, the Hebrew Scriptures, to receive them as the Word of God, and so they will quote Old Testament Scriptures. We think of Peter on the day of Pentecost quoting several Old Testament passages, not only Joel 2, but Psalm 16 and Psalm 110. Or the apostle Paul preaching in the synagogues of the dispersion, again quoting Scriptures, because they know that's going to be received as an authoritative word from God. On the other hand, when Paul goes to Lystra, Acts 14, or to Athens in Acts 17, he doesn't quote Scripture. Now everything he says can be demonstrated from God's revealed Word from the Bible, but instead, he references the general revelation of God in the created order because that is revelation that confronts every pagan Gentile, whether they acknowledge or not, one God or many gods — many of them were worshipers of many gods — still Paul can know that they're confronted with that clear revelation of God the Creator. And so he speaks to them at a starting point in terms of what they were familiar with, in terms of God's general revelation, always to bring them to Christ, always to bring them to that point that now something, now something new has happened as a result of God sending the Messiah, not only as the rescuer of Israel, but also as the Savior of the nations. And that, I think, is a wise way for us to think about our preaching, thinking about where our congregation is, where our audience is in terms of what they understand already, beginning where they are and then leading them more deeply into an understanding of the fullness of the gospel.

**Question 10:****What are some responsible applications we can draw from our beliefs about the visible and invisible church?**

**It's inevitable that the visible church will have unbelieving members. But the invisible church is pure, consisting only of believers. But how do these two concepts relate to each other? Should we emphasize the invisible church to the point that we try to purge every unbeliever from the visible church? Should we focus on the visible church to the point that we assume that everyone in our congregations is saved? What are some responsible applications we can draw from our beliefs about the visible and invisible church?**

**Dr. Donald Whitney**

We talk in both theology and in history about the visible church and about the invisible church. The visible church is generally referred to as the local expression of the body of Christ that can be made up of real Christians, and people who think they are Christians. The invisible church would be the people of God of all times, and all places, heaven and earth — so, all that have been the people of God forever — that's the invisible church because there are many members, a great majority of them, we cannot see at the present time. They are in heaven with the Lord, or they are in other places of the world. The visible church is that which we typically think of as the local church — when Christians gather together, maybe many churches come together. But it's important to remember that in the visible church there will always be “wheat and tares,” as Jesus said. You'll have the true people of God; you'll have people who appear to be. Just like you had the disciples who were those faithful to Jesus, but you had Judas in there. Paul had his Demas among those that were his disciples, if you will. So, there will always be those in the local church.

Nevertheless, it's the responsibility of the local church by means of church discipline, by means of preaching a faithful gospel, by means of holding people accountable to walk faithfully to Christ, that if we discern there may be an unconverted people among us — a tare among the wheat — then we should deal in biblical ways. Even though on the one hand we acknowledge there will be tares among the wheat, we are not encouraged thereby to just ignore that. So, when someone manifests themselves as potentially a Judas, a Demas, a tare, the Lord has given us in Scripture a biblical means to pursue that church discipline: we start with Matthew 18, we go to that person, we confront them, and so forth. We bring someone else with us on step two. Ultimately, that comes to the church, and the church is to decide, according to what Matthew 18 says and 1 Corinthians 5, that if that person decides to continue to live like an unbeliever, unrepentant in their sin, then we are to treat them like an unbeliever. We are to remove them from the visible church, from the privileges and protections of the visible church, and we are to consider them now an unbeliever and pray for them. We continue to witness to them, but we don't give them the privileges of membership and of fellowship.



So, the idea of the invisible church is largely a very important, but a theoretical concept in a sense that we acknowledge it is there. It does not have a lot of impact except in the sense that we know we are dealing with people in other places that we cannot see who are alive now. We say that we are part of the church of Christ with them. That brothers and sisters in China, in Africa, in America are all one in Christ, and we will never see each other except in heaven. It's important to acknowledge that, because that makes us want to pray for one another and love one another, support one another, and help one another as best we can, and these sorts of things, because we will never see each other in this world perhaps.

But most of the idea of the invisible church is largely not unimportant theory, but theory to us. But the visible church, the local body of Christ, is the emphasis in the New Testament. I have done a study that I recall the statistics were something like 125 mentions of the Greek word *ekklesia* of the church of the New Testament, about 117 or 118 were clearly about the local church, about the visible church. So that's the emphasis in the New Testament. That's the emphasis I'm giving now, and I think that's the emphasis we want to give it, without neglecting the other, but really, the New Testament emphasis is the local, the visible church.

#### **Dr. John Frame**

The church in a way consists of both believers and unbelievers, but we have to understand what that means. We're talking then of the external relationship that people have to the church. Internally, what the reformed traditions call the "invisible church," there are no unbelievers there. The unbelievers enter the visible church only because we can't read their hearts, and sometimes they will be interviewed by elders for church membership and they will make a good show of it, and they'll sound as though they believe the things we do, and they'll sound as if they're united to Christ in faith and so they get into the church, but we can't read their hearts, and so, perhaps under all of that they're hypocritical, they're unbelieving, and so the church, externally the church that meets on Sunday morning, may consist of both believers and unbelievers, but of course that doesn't mean anything so far as God's reckoning of who's in the church and who isn't, and so from God's reckoning, of course the only ones that receive salvation, the only ones who are going to heaven will be the ones who are united to Christ in faith. And in the final analysis that's a matter of the heart, and God sees it. And so the church is going to be divided in time, the wheat and the tares will be separated and so believers alone will find themselves in glory with Jesus for all eternity.

### **Question 11:**

#### **How should the church treat the unbelieving world?**

**If believers sometimes have difficulties figuring out the relationship between ourselves and the unbelievers in the visible church, it can be even harder to know how the church should respond to unbelievers outside the church. Are we obligated to serve them and sacrifice for them as if they were part of the church? Are we**

**allowed to ignore them and let them deal with their own problems? Should we despise them since they're God's enemies? How should the church treat the unbelieving world?**

**Dr. Robert Lister**

Christians, in their attitude towards unbelievers, need to start with the careful reminder that we're not God. And we can be glad that we're not God. Not being God means, among other things, that we're not responsible to pass final judgment on anyone. And so, while we can trust that the Lord of all the earth will do right in what he does with any individual, that's not a role that's assigned to us. And we know that while unbelievers are yet living, while they're yet breathing, one of the things that God is doing is being kind to them in giving them yet more opportunity to repent. God's demonstrating patience to people who already deserve to be under judgment that they might have more opportunity to repent. And so one of the things that we would do as creatures and not the Creator, is seize that opportunity to pray for them, to share the gospel with them. Many of us have loved ones who are not believers and are committed to be in prayer for those loved ones as well as unreached peoples around the world. So we have to differentiate our role from God's role, trusting God to do his and to do his in a way that no one will have a claim of injustice against God, while also recognizing that while unbelievers are living, they have an opportunity to repent, and we want to present them with that opportunity as much as we possibly can. The other thing that's critical to remember is that we were once unbelievers ourselves, and if we had a holier-than-thou attitude or a superior-to-unbeliever kind of attitude, that would betray a misunderstanding of what we were and that the only difference between us and them now is God's grace in our lives, and it's nothing intrinsic to us. And so we can celebrate God's work in our lives and seek by prayer and evangelism God's work in their lives as well, trusting that the Lord will call his sheep to himself in ways and times that are appropriate to the outworking of his plan.

**Dr. Dennis Johnson**

In view of the fact that Revelation shows so clearly that all of God's enemies will be destroyed in the final judgment, our attitude toward unbelievers should be a combination of courage, compassion and humility. Courage because we don't need to be intimidated by those enemies. We know that the God of justice will bring his and our enemies to justice in the last day. Martin Luther was right in that great hymn that we so often sing, "A Mighty Fortress is our God": "The body they may kill; but God's truth abideth still; his kingdom is forever." So we don't need to be fearful, intimidated or silenced. We do need to be compassionate for unbelievers. They deserve justice even as we deserve justice, but we also are called in the whole Scripture to long for God to intervene, to turn enemies into friends in the way that only he can through the gospel and the power of the Spirit to give new life. So we should be involved in compassionate witness to them. One of the key attributes of the church in the book of Revelation is that the church is the witness of Christ, extending the work of Jesus who is the faithful witness. And so our witness is to God's truth, but it's also for the sake of God's mercy entering into the lives of more people. And then we need humility toward unbelievers. The reality of coming judgment reminds

us that that's exactly what we, as followers of Christ, deserve as well. This is what Jesus bore for us on the cross. And so we have no reason to be arrogant toward unbelievers. We have no reason to be harsh toward them. We have every reason to be humbled by the reality of judgment, even as we express a courageous and compassionate witness to the gospel to them.

**Dr. John McKinley**

We can be tempted to have an attitude of superiority about ourselves, and especially if they have mistreated us or if they mock us, that kind of thing. But I think that Jesus would want us to have the attitude of desiring to serve them, have compassion, to view them as the lost because we don't know who is going to turn, and so we want to serve them by preaching the gospel to them and hope that they will respond. When we think about on the other side of judgment, what is our attitude to be then? And there should be, I think, a sense of pity and sadness towards them. And we would want to have at that point a clear conscience that we did love them while we had the opportunity to tell the gospel to them and that they won't be able to point the finger to us and say, "You knew. Why didn't you tell me about this Christ?" So we need to be living with them with a view to the future, not condemning them in advance, but serving them and helping them find rescue in Christ, and also not being retaliating, you know, nursing a grudge in our heart or something like that, but having pity when they don't respond to the gospel and having hope that they will.

**Question 12:**

**When should our charitable giving remain with those in the church, and when should it go to people outside the church?**

**Historically, one important way that the church has provided help and shown mercy to those outside the church is to meet their physical needs. And these means have often been instrumental in bringing people to faith. But it can be hard to know when to spend our limited resources on the needs of those outside the church, especially when there may be similar needs within the church. When should our charitable giving remain with those in the church, and when should it go to people outside the church?**

**Dr. John Frame**

The rule that Paul gives us in the New Testament is to do good to all, but especially to those who are of the household of faith. I don't think that means sitting down with a ledger and planning your church budget and saying, "We're gonna give 95% to the church and 5% to people outside the church." I don't think it works that way. The church is a family, it's an extended family, and so naturally we're going to give more to our own people than to people outside. For one thing, we know the needs of the people that we see every week, and we're able to help them in a way that we can't help people beyond that realm. But consider the parable of the good Samaritan where you see somebody who's dying by the side of the road or when somebody enters your life or enters the life of your church in a very dramatic way, and there's no way to

ascertain what his religious beliefs are or if he has a belief in God or anything that you believe, but your first instinct ought to be to help, to meet the person's needs. And you don't give him a creedal test or religious test. You simply do what you can. And so I think we ought to, more or less, leave this up to God's providence. Of course we want to help our — just as in a family — we give the bulk of our assistance to our own children and our own spouses, but if we run into somebody who's in need, and we're uniquely able to provide for that need, then we ought to do it.

### **Question 13:**

### **What are some practical ways that churches can carry out the Great Commission?**

**The church's most important task related to the unbelieving world is Jesus' command that we make disciples of all nations. We often call this the "Great Commission." As part of the Great Commission, the church evangelizes the lost in every nation by telling them the gospel. The Great Commission also includes discipling believers, and gathering believers into local church congregations. Given the monumental nature of this assignment, what are some practical ways that churches can carry out the Great Commission?**

#### **Dr. Simon Vibert**

The challenge at the end of the Gospels is that we should go into all nations, proclaiming the good news and making disciples. The language of discipleship implies more than just being a learner. It implies more than just being a believer, but it also implies being in a relationship with God. Yes, the God who will teach us. Yes, the God who will lead us, but the challenge to make disciples is to have people who will be in a lifetime's apprenticeship, relationship, with God, and therefore that needs to be well-modeled. So, I think that people need to be in relationship with other believers who can show them how to live the Christian life well. It needs, obviously, teaching as well. People need to understand God's requirements of his followers and his disciples. But I think, also, it needs to be embedded in the church because it is there that God has put in place the structures for people to grow as Christians and indeed to be "lifelong learners," to use that phrase, those who are in relationship with God and following him faithfully.

#### **Dr. Saul Cruz (translation)**

Communicating the gospel, taking the Great Commission seriously, implies proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It's like John Stott once said: It's like two wings of the same bird. The bird cannot fly with only one of them; it needs both wings to fly. In the same way, the Great Commission only really takes true effect in the lives of people, in their relationships and their societies, when people understand that the message needs to be communicated with words and deeds. The words bring a sense of clarity to the message, but the deeds also show us the significance of God's love, of God's compassion.

**Mr. Emad Sami (translation)**

It's essential for believers and servants of the gospel to strive to make the gospel alive if they want to reach out to people and fulfill the Great Commission. For God to come to the world, he became flesh in Jesus Christ. And for us to be able to proclaim the gospel and to reach out to the world, we have to realize that the world is comprised of different peoples, different languages, different cultures, and different civilizations. In every nation, every race, and every ethnic group we recognize that there is a special shape, color, civilization, specific mentality and behavior. Everyone should present the gospel to the people in a way that they can understand, in a manner that they can grasp, and within the context of the mentality of the people and their civilizations. You might ask how we can effectively present the gospel to someone from another culture. In order to communicate the gospel to other people, we need to simplify and interpret the gospel through tools and a variety of methods that other people's way of life, culture, and civilization will accept.

**Dr. Willie Wells**

We understand that Jesus left us a model on how to reach the lostness of mankind, and it is a model that is without flaw. It is a perfect model. It worked in the twentieth century, it will work in the twenty-first century, and if Jesus stays in heaven a little longer, it will continue to work. That model is evangelism. Evangelism crosses cultures, it crosses denominations, it crosses the different positions of people, the socioeconomic standing whether it be good or bad. It comes to a person or to persons that are lost. So, some of the steps is that we not only get people saved by preaching and teaching and witnessing the gospel of Jesus Christ, but then, what are we are going to do after they have been saved? And the problem is that most people are not assimilated into different churches because they don't feel like they are a part of it. So how do we continue to do the Great Commission? Well, we know we have to witness, and we know we have to witness first of all at home, and at home could be literally at your home. Then also I believe that we should do evangelistic work inside your particular churches because there are people in the church from time to time that may be associated with the church as a result of their parents or grandparents or some other personality. But I would say that if you want to start, start in Jerusalem — start at your home, start in your church, witnessing the gospel of Jesus Christ. And then once you've done that, then you reach out abroad, and you try to touch those in the community, and then from the community to other parts and facets of the world so that the gospel can be disseminated all over, that people would have a chance to hear the gospel and be saved.

So we think about we are to keep in mind our position when it comes to practical steps and witnessing, getting people saved is that let evangelism do what it's supposed to do. And when I talk about evangelism, there is a simplicity of it, and we have to make sure that we don't become muddled with the simplicity of it and try to add on things that make it become difficult. So what do I mean when I say that? I say that we are to, first of all, pray that the Holy Spirit leads us and guides us, and then secondly, make sure that we take the gospel, not man's ideology, but the gospel. And we do know that if we lift up Jesus, that he will draw men unto him. The great thing

that makes me so excited about witnessing to people that don't know Christ is the fact that I don't have the responsibility to bring them alongside Christ. I do have the responsibility to go in and preach the gospel, to witness the good news of Jesus Christ, but the hardest part is left up to Christ himself. All I need to do is lift him up, and then he'll draw men unto him. So when we think about that, prayer needs to be the object, needs to be the nucleus, and then we take the gospel and we take it into all the world. And once we've done that, I believe we'll hear him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

### **Question 14:**

#### **Can a well-meaning person be saved without coming to faith in Christ?**

**God commissioned the church to share the gospel with the world and to point people to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. But many people think they don't need Christ. They believe that if they're good or moral enough, they can earn their way to heaven. Others believe that if they earnestly follow a different religion with good intentions, they can be saved too. But what does Scripture say about this? Can a well-meaning person be saved without coming to faith in Christ?**

#### **Dr. Simon Vibert**

A question that people often ask is, is it possible for anybody to be saved outside of personal faith in Jesus Christ? And the Bible is quite clear that Jesus is the only way to be saved, to be rescued from our sins, and it's through a knowledge of him that we come to have our sins forgiven and come into relationship with God. But, of course, the particular angle to the question is, well, what about those who have never heard, is it possible for them to be saved without knowing Jesus for themselves? To which the Bible also says, well, no. That's why evangelism is so important and critical. We want the world to know that Jesus is the Savior of all people. Now, of course, ultimately God is the judge and what people have done with what they know about Jesus is ultimately his business. But our job is to make sure that we go with a degree of urgency so that all the world get to hear the saving message in Jesus alone.

#### **Dr. Derek Thomas**

Can a well-meaning person who is not a Christian, but maybe a good person — in whatever way you define that — can they come to salvation without putting their faith in Jesus Christ? The question is the so-called "wider hope" question. If we're thinking of those, say, living in another country who have never heard of Jesus Christ, can they be saved? Say, a well-meaning Hindu. Can he or she be saved apart from faith in Christ? And I think the answer to that must categorically be, "no," that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. And unless with our mouths we profess Jesus to be Jesus Christ, to be Lord and Savior, there is no possibility of salvation. Outside of Christ, there is none other name, under heaven, given amongst men whereby we must be saved, only Jesus Christ.

**Dr. Donald Whitney**

There are passages both in the Old and New Testament, I am thinking of one in Proverbs right now that says that, "The prayer of the wicked is an abomination of the Lord." It is the strongest possible term, and we naturally tend to think that, well, if a person is not a sincere follower of Christ, but they come to a place of crisis and say, "I will acknowledge, in this case, God, I need you, and I will bow the knee and I will pray. It is true that I have not been a follower of yours, but I really need help this time. I can't handle this on my own, and I'm turning to you. I'm asking you, and I'm humbling myself in this situation to ask for your help." The Bible says that's an abomination to the Lord. Now, that's really counter-intuitive to us because we think that surely God would be at least somewhat impressed that the person would be willing, on this occasion, to humble themselves and ask for God's help. But the Bible says that's an abomination because it implies that God would be impressed, and answer based upon the piety of that person. And if he were to do so, then that is the greatest possible insult to him, because he sent his Son Jesus to be the means by which we could come to him. So, it is ignoring the means that God has given. It is saying in effect, "Well, Jesus, thank you for coming, but it really wasn't necessary in my case. And all that you did on this earth for 33 years in suffering, and all that you did in experiencing the wrath of God, and all that you went through in your crucifixion, well, thank you very much, Jesus, but it wasn't really necessary in my case because I was convinced that God would be impressed by my piety." What greater insult could there be against God than that we would think that he would accept us based upon what we do, whether it's our temporary piety or something else?

So, the big question is not so much, why aren't there other ways to God; why can't there be a way to God through one of these other religions? The greater question really is, why is there still a way? Why is God good enough to permit there to be one way in light of the fact that the history of the world has been that in every nation people have turned away. In every tribe, in every tongue, in every people, in every individual, manifests what Isaiah talks about when he says that each of us has turned to his own way. That we have all, like sheep, have turned away, gone away, and we do that despite how much of the truth God has revealed in creation in general. The Bible says that through what has been made, Romans 1:20 tells us, that God has revealed himself in general through creation, but yet people don't respond to even that much light, and they tend to go their own way. And he has given us the gospel, and he has given us the Bible, and despite all that, even in nations where they have been raised to hear the gospel of Jesus and to hear of Jesus in the Bible, people still go their own way. And despite having done that since the creation of time, the issue isn't so much as why doesn't God permit there to be many ways to him, it's why in his mercy does he permit there to be one way. And he does, so to reject the one way he has given us through his Son Jesus is such a great insult. So, if Jesus says that he is the only way to God, either he is or he isn't.

And C.S. Lewis famously said that if Jesus makes such a claim, he is either a liar, and he knew he was not the only way to God, but he said he was. He is a lunatic because

he thought he was the only way to God. Or he is indeed what he said he is. He is the Lord of all, and he is the way to God. And Christians believe that the resurrection of Jesus validates that claim. I could claim to be the only way to God. Anyone could claim to be the only way to God, but Jesus has validated that claim not only with the miracles of his lifetime because other people have claimed to perform miracles, but Jesus gave the ultimate validation of his claim by rising from the dead three days after he had been in the grave, and to ascend to heaven and live there forever. So, we believe that God in his mercy has given us this one way, and it's open to anyone. It is open to all.

### **Question 15:**

#### **What does the Bible say should be our attitude toward the suffering and persecution we endure?**

**Despite the wonderful gift of salvation that God freely offers in the gospel, many unbelievers respond negatively to the church's effort to carry out the Great Commission. And this negativity isn't restricted to rejections of the gospel message, or even to poor opinions of Christians. At various times and places throughout history, the church has been subjected to suffering and persecution because of our attempts to promote the gospel of God's kingdom. When this happens, it's easy for Christians to become angry, or frustrated, or to despair. But what does the Bible say should be our attitude toward the suffering and persecution we endure?**

#### **Dr. John McKinley**

When we experience suffering and persecution, we can wonder what should our attitude be about these kinds of things. I think first we should have the attitude of not shock and surprise. We've been told abundantly in Scripture that this stuff is going to happen to us. Somehow in God's sovereignty, he perfects his people through suffering. It was the case for Jesus, we're following in his steps, and so we can expect to have difficulty in life. We're assured in the midst of that that God is going to bring us through even as much as we're sure we're going to have suffering. And in Romans 8, Paul tells us that we are more than conquerors through all these things, that we are to count them not as somehow God abandoning us, but God using them, just like a good coach for an athlete, to train us, to bring us closer to him, to fight against our real enemy which is our sin, in ways we obstruct God by our fears and hold back from him. So, the apostles rejoiced when they suffered. They thought it was a great thing to be counted worthy, to suffer for the name. Certainly persecution for the sake of Christ is easier to bear, but all kinds of sufferings that come to us are redemptive, whether it's cancer or a difficult sickness, or trouble at work, or financial distresses. These things are all God's materials to transform us. And then we cry out for help. We cling to God, we identify with Christ, and we have a communion of suffering with our fellow believers and find God comforting us in that. So we should have gratitude in a weird kind of way that we are being treated as children, and this is discipline, where God is disciplining us and helping us to become like Christ through these difficulties that we go through.



**Dr. Glen Scorgie**

How Christians grow and mature in Christ is seldom determined by how little or how much persecution they experience, but by their attitude or response to the persecution or suffering that comes into their lives. And so, what is the appropriate response to suffering and persecution? I think the first thing is that a true follower of Jesus Christ will grow more concerned about the suffering of others than their own suffering. The Spirit is always nudging us away from the narcissist center of ourselves to vigorous advocacy of others in pain. It's a self-forgetful dynamic. God's redemption involves the deliverance of human beings from all suffering and injustice, and so we should not be passive in the face of that which is wrong, that which makes human beings suffer, because it grieves God's heart as well. And so we should be active in kingdom work, active in peacemaking, active in exposing and rebuking evil. That's part of our calling. But there come times when it is not within our authority or our power to change some of the variables that cause pain and suffering in our own lives and the lives of others. There the wisdom of the New Testament writers comes into play. We are to reframe these experiences as opportunities to grow in the transformation of our souls. These are opportunities for us to reconceptualize ourselves as prisoners, not of evil, but as prisoners of the Lord Jesus Christ, accepting, when there is no other way, that this is the will of God for us. And to endure these things with a cheerful expectation that they are interim, provisional, transitory, short term. And so we see even the dark things that cannot be removed as purposive, and as something in which we can show a measure of grace and thankfulness to our Lord Jesus, and see ourselves as his servants.

**Rev. Mike Glodo**

If you look at God's people throughout the Old Testament, God allowed them to suffer at different times for two general purposes. One is to refine them, to teach them to depend upon him alone, and the other is to show his glory among the nations and how he would deliver his people or save his people from suffering. The slavery in Egypt is an example. The cycles in the book of Judges where Israel's heart would turn away from him during times of ease and prosperity, and through the suffering or the persecution that he allowed, their hearts would be turned back to him. In a very large-scale way, he does it through the exile. In the book of Hosea, we hear God say through the prophet, I will take her into the wilderness, and there I will speak kindly to her. It often requires suffering for our hard-heartedness, or our ease to cause us to not persevere, or to not be faithful to the Lord. And God uses that. But he also uses it to bring attention to himself for the sake of the nations. Jesus said that if anyone would seek to be my disciple, he would need to take up his cross and follow him. In Matthew 8 and 9, Jesus is making clear that the path to his glory was going to go through the cross, including his rejection and suffering, but moreover, that the path to glory for Jesus' disciples would also travel that same way. And just as Jesus' suffering and death was for the life of the world, so in a similar, although not identical sense, the suffering of the church and the suffering of God's people is a life-bringing thing for the world. The apostle Paul talks about filling up that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, meaning we are to bear with humility and gladness the cost of discipleship. It is often said of the early church, the power of their witness was that

they died so well, that they bore suffering in a way that showed their ultimate loyalties weren't to this world but to God. But because of that, then they were of great earthly good, that they were compassionate. They didn't seek to associate with the powerful, but instead they went to the powerless. They didn't seek favor with those who could bless them, but rather they sought to bless those who were in need. And so we have this mind in ourselves, this attitude that was in Christ Jesus, as Paul says in Philippians 2, so that if we share in his sufferings, we will also share in his resurrection and his glory.

### **Question 16:** **What does it mean to be “in Christ”?**

**When we suffer for the sake of the gospel, it's helpful to remember that we don't suffer alone. Not only does the church suffer with us, but Jesus does too. Through our spiritual union with him, our sufferings are his sufferings. This theological concept of “union with Christ” is present throughout the New Testament, but it's particularly prominent in Paul's writings, and can frequently be seen in phrases like “in Christ,” “in Jesus,” “in the Lord,” “in him,” and so on. But how exactly does this union work? What does it mean to be “in Christ”?**

#### **Dr. Simon Vibert**

Well, one of Paul's favorite terms for what it means to be a Christian is to be “in Christ,” and the idea there is that, as we become a Christian, we are brought into such a relationship with God that we are tied up with the person of Christ. So, it's because of his sacrifice for sin, because of his resurrection from the dead that I can know forgiveness, that I can know new life. And that's integrally tied to Jesus's person and work. So, to use a shorthand, Paul says that, I can talk about being in Christ because all that's Christ's benefit has become my benefit and standing before God, too.

#### **Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.**

Jesus has told us that he came in order that we might have life and have it more abundantly. But, you know, in this life, after we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, we still experience suffering, pain, illness; we still die. We still have frustrations and ambitions. We still experience irritations and for that matter griefs. You know, a part of what we need to recognize here is that evidently a part of what it means to receive this abundant life is to have Christ in the midst of these things. We will come to know things in our Christian life we would not know if we were never irritated or frustrated. We would never know if we did not experience grief as well as exhilaration and joy. I think there's something more here that's really important. Jesus said, “I came that you might have life, and that you might have life that is abundant.” But you know, we are yearning for something. A part of what it means to be “in Christ” is to yearn for the fullness that he's going to bring. There's a day coming when Christ is coming for his church. There's a day coming when Christ will reign over all things in a way that is visible to all. There's coming a day when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. There's coming a day

when every eye will be dry, and every tear will be wiped away. A part of what it means right now for us to have the abundant life in Christ is for us to rest in Christ, experiencing all the joys and travails that come into a life in this fallen world while yearning for that which we know is coming. The abundant life means trusting Christ until he comes.

### **Question 17:**

#### **What are some of the benefits of union with Christ?**

**Union with Christ is a remarkable reality that spiritually joins us to our Lord. It's the source of great comfort when we suffer, since we know that Jesus suffers with us. But it's also a source of many other blessings, too. So, what are some of these blessings? What are some of the benefits of union with Christ?**

#### **Dr. John Frame**

Some of the benefits of union with Christ? Well, for one thing it's very hard for us to list them all because just about everything we have according to the New Testament is in Christ. But in theology we usually distinguish between legal and representative union, and that brings, of course, justification and adoption. Jesus is the one whose righteousness becomes imputed to us, and so we become righteous for his sake. And we are righteous in Christ, not in ourselves. And on that ground, of course, God adopts us to be children of his family. And then there's what is sometimes called "mystical union," which, again, is very hard to describe, very hard to form into words. But we're told in the New Testament that all the blessings of salvation are in Christ, and particularly, he is our friend. He is our Lord. He is the one we turn to in times of trouble. He says, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the ends of the earth." He is with us in the Spirit. He is with us as we worship and as we eat the elements of the Lord's Supper. He's just always near to us and always involved in everything that we do.

### **Question 18:**

#### **Should each means of grace be administered every time the church gathers for worship?**

**God has provided the church with a variety of means or tools through which he applies blessings to our lives. And because these blessings are based on his gracious love for us, we often refer to these tools as "means of grace." Theologians have traditionally highlighted three of these as being central to the life of the church: the Word of God; the sacraments or ordinances of the Lord's Supper and baptism; and prayer. But other means of grace are important, too, and all depend on faith as an underlying means. Now, given the importance of receiving God's blessing, Christians sometimes wonder, should each means of grace be administered every time the church gathers for worship?**

**Dr. Steve Harper**

When we're talking about the means of grace, the spiritual disciplines, the revelation of God's grace and our response to that grace, we can always talk about it in the personal, or maybe even small group sense of that term. But, sooner or later you have to ask about worship. What happens when the people of God gather to worship? Some people will ask, do the means of grace have to manifest themselves every time that we worship? I think that a response to that question hinges on the phrase, "every time" and also on "worship." So let me deal with it. Nothing has to happen every time. In other words, there is no checklist that God has given us when we worship. In our church, sometimes the prayer time is not much more than the pastoral prayer; sometimes there are twenty-five or thirty prayer requests. And that moment extends into maybe fifteen, twenty, twenty-five minutes. Which means that other things don't get the same amount of attention that they might on some other Sundays. So, I think when it comes to the means of grace, we want to be sure that we don't try to control how God uses the means of grace because, in the final analysis, worship itself is a means of grace. So, it's not saying, you know, "Are the means of grace active in worship?" as much as recognizing that worship is a means of grace.

Now, having said that, I think it is reasonable when we gather for worship, that the means of grace of Scripture should be there, the means of grace of prayer should be there. I happen to believe that we should celebrate the Lord's Supper every time we gather together. Churches that do it once a month, once a quarter, twice a year, have not tapped their richness of the sacramental theology. Whether there needs to be a baptism every time; that would be wonderful. If we had new believers coming to faith, or in some cases, traditions that baptize infants that had parents, that had parents who were ready to present their child to the church for holy baptism. That would be wonderful. So, I think what I want to say about that is, every time we gather for worship, worship is itself a means of grace. We don't have to say, "We hope a means of grace is happening;" worship is a means of grace. Then in that larger picture, in the means of grace God is going to give to us Scripture and prayer and Lord's Supper and Christian conferencing and out of that will come a unique experience of worship, but which is, itself is, a means of grace. That is, it is a response to what God wanted to say to us that moment and do for us in that moment.

**Question 19:****How can we promote unity and reconciliation between believers?**

**Despite the great blessings God has poured out on the church, believers are still fallen human beings. And as a result, sometimes the opposition we face comes from sin within the church itself. Believers are all united to Christ and to each other in Christ. But sometimes we don't act like it. We fight with each other, condemn each other, and even divide from each other over issues like theology, practice, church government, and even ethnicity. How can we promote unity and reconciliation between believers?**

**Dr. John Frame**

I think that Christians of different denominations should take every occasion they can to work together and to discuss their differences and I think that we need to come to a point where we can admit that our own traditions, our own denominations, haven't always been what God has wanted them to be. We need to look at our own denominations with a critical eye, and we should be looking for opportunities in which to bring denominations together. Denominations, of course, differ on many accounts. They differ doctrinally, they differ according to practices, liturgical practices, and they differ ethnically too. A lot of denominational differences are just because one is Dutch and one is English, or something like that. There ought to be, given that there are 20,000 denominations or so, it ought to be possible to find a lot of cases where these differences really don't matter much, and we should be willing to sacrifice those for the sake of the unity of the body of Christ. And so, I think we ought to hang loose to our denominational traditions much more than we do, and we ought to be looking as hard as we can to find opportunities to erase these differences and to restore the unity of the body of Christ.

**Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.**

There is a unity that we must always seek and understand. It's the unity of all believers: one faith, one Lord, one baptism. And you can never forfeit that, and we must never slander that nor slight that. But the reality is that there is also a real sense in which that one church is one doctrine. It's one great truth. I mean, you go to one Lord, one faith. That means that there are certain centrals we have to hold together as a mark of that unity. That's also just a reminder to us that where there are doctrinal aberrations that deny that which is central in, essential to, Christianity, it's not really a question of church unity. It's a question of whether it's a true church at all. Because where central to central doctrines are denied, it's not really a question of the unity of the church. It's a question of the identity of the church. The true church is always going to be marked by unity even when we disagree on matters of secondary importance, even when we might organize our congregations differently, different believing Christians, recognizing each other as authentic Christians differ on different points of understanding. But the unity is that we know that God knows exactly what is true, and that God will one day instruct his true church in such a way that we will all come to a common understanding. That's when we are before him glorified, when the church is face to face with our Savior. Until then, we need to demonstrate unity, but we need to make sure that that unity is established in doctrine and in truth, not merely in our intentions.

**Ephesians 5:25 says, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." We are the bride of Christ. And since humanity's fall into sin, God has used the church to build his kingdom and to redeem our broken world. The church is not our salvation, but it is the heart of God's kingdom on earth, and it's a means of healing and restoration. And for that reason, we should confidently affirm, with all the saints throughout the world, "We believe in ... the church."**

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