

## The Resurrection Community

### Review: What is 'Reformational' or 'Reformed' Theology?

- Definition: All of life lived according to the Word of God, by the grace of God, through faith in the Son of God, united by the Spirit of God, to magnify and enjoy God.
- Big Ideas: God rules and controls all things in creation, salvation, and history (*the sovereignty of God*)  
The Bible is a single, unfolding story of God's saving promises to man (*covenant theology*)  
The church is always striving to bring all of life in line with God's Word (*always reforming*)  
Justification (being *declared* righteous) is distinct from sanctification (being *made* righteous)

### Review: Gospel Sanctification

- The OT contained three types of laws: ceremonial, judicial, and moral (the Ten Commandments)
- Moral obedience is not a way of earning points with God. Jesus earned all the points you'll ever need.
- *Debt consolidation*: by paying all our debt to God's law, Jesus bought us for himself:  
We don't follow the moral law to *earn* life in heaven;  
We follow the moral law to *enjoy* the life of heaven.  
"Allegiance to a person has displaced devotion to a code."<sup>1</sup>
- Gospel sanctification looks deeper than outward behavior. To expel sin, we must:
  - Identify and confess the heart idols (attention, comfort, control) that motivate us to sin,
  - Identify the deeper, legitimate desire (value, safety) that the idols have hijacked, *and*
  - Preach the gospel to yourself: Jesus is better! He gives us value/safety in a way no idol can provide!

### Today: the Resurrection Community

- God knows that no human being can follow him alone. "No man is an island," (John Donne).
- In order to help us grow in love for God and others, God placed us into a community: the church.
- Many Protestants have a low, "vitamin view" of the visible church: maybe helpful, but really optional.
- Reformational churches have a high view of the visible church: not infallible, but also not optional.

### The Church: Invisible and Visible

- The *invisible* church is the church *as God sees it*: every true Christian in all of history (Rev. 7:9-17), perfectly united in Christ our Head (Eph. 1:22-23).
- The *visible* church is the church *as we see it*: every confessing Christian, along with their children, alive in the world today, divided among various nations, cultures, denominations, and congregations.
- The visible church is the current manifestation of the invisible church:  
The invisible church is like a great railroad track – stretching down through history from the gates of Garden of Eden to the gates of the New Jerusalem. The visible church is like a single train traveling this track. The engine is Christ, the passenger cars are denominations, and the position of the train corresponds to the present calendar date in the world's history.
- If there is only one train traveling from Eden to New Jerusalem, how important is it that we be on it?  
Is it possible that a legitimate passenger may for a season fail to catch, or fall off, the train? Yes.  
Is it possible that a person may for a season board the train without possessing a ticket? Yes.  
Can a person credibly/consistently claim to be a passenger if they refuse to board the train? No.

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<sup>1</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 189.

## The Necessity of the Visible Church

- Christians are united to Christ and united to his body (1 Cor. 12:20-27). This is not just true in an invisible sense, but in a visible way: "...that all the members may have the same care for one another."
- Converts at Pentecost joined themselves together into a countable, visible body (Acts 2:41-27): "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."
- New Testament teaching on church discipline (1 Cor. 5:1-5) and discipleship (Heb. 13:7) all assume that Christians will be part of an organized, visible body led by elders.
- Apart from extraordinary circumstances (Lk. 23:39-43), the New Testament never shows us Christians that are not connected to a visible body of other believers.
- We may become disillusioned by failures or hurt by abuses in the church – and sometimes such struggles means we need to move to a different church. But we should never *abandon* the visible church.

Quitting the church is exactly what Satan and his minions are hoping we will do:

One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patient sees is the half-finished, sham Gothic erection on the new building estate. When he goes inside, he sees the local grocer with rather an oily expression on his face bustling up to offer him one shiny little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands, and one shabby little book containing corrupt texts of a number of religious lyrics, mostly bad, and in very small print. When he gets to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbours whom he has hitherto avoided. You want to lean pretty heavily on those neighbours. Make his mind flit to and fro between an expression like 'the body of Christ' and the actual faces in the next pew. It matters very little, of course, what kind of people that next pew really contains. You may know one of them to be a great warrior on the Enemy's side. No matter. Your patient, thanks to Our Father Below, is a fool. Provided that any of those neighbours sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous.<sup>2</sup>

- Implication: This is why we strongly encourage church membership – not because we think our congregation is the only good church, but because the Bible teaches every Christian needs an organic connection to a visible body of believers.

## The Purpose of the Visible Church

- *Westminster Confession*: "...the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life to the end of the world." This idea of "gathering and perfecting" summarizes three great tasks given to the church:
    - Worship / Consecration (Rev. 7:7-10, Rom. 12:1-2, Mat. 18:20, Rev. 1:12-13)  
As the body of Christ, we lift up our heads and hearts to God in love and song and wonder
    - Work / Community (Acts 2:41-47, 1 Cor. 12:20-28, Gal. 6:2, Eph. 4:11-13, 1 Th. 5:11)  
As the body of Christ, we open up our heads and hearts to one another for encouragement, help, etc.
    - Witness / Conversion (Mat. 28:19-20)  
As the body of Christ, we open our hearts and hands to a dying world, to show them a better way.
- "What is the church?** It is the true seed of faithful Abraham, Jew and non-Jew together, chosen by God, justified through faith, and freed from sin for a new life of personal righteousness and mutual ministry. It is the family of a loving heavenly Father, living in hope of inheriting his entire fortune. **It is the community of the resurrection, in which the powers of Christ's historic death and present heavenly life are already at work.**"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1993), 254