



## **MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH**

Sermon Notes

*An Introduction to the Church, Part 1*

**Ephesians 3:4-6**

**January 6, 2013**

“<sup>4</sup> When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”  
Ephesians 3:4-6

- Over the past month, we have been examining the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ and how this historical and theological reality relates to us today.
- We learned that through the Incarnation, God condescended to us through the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, that through faith in Him we might live eternally with Him.
- And now we turn our attention to the institution established by Christ on this earth: the Church.
- The first question before us today is this: Does the Incarnation of Jesus Christ have anything to do with the Church today? Of course the answer is a resounding, Yes!
- But the greater question is: How?
- It has become one of my greatest convictions recently that Christians today have so neglected “the Church” and commitment to it, that there is no wonder why the Christian Church has so little influence on our culture today.

- May we never forget that Christ did not establish the government, or para-church organizations, or faith-based institutions to be His means of mercy and grace in this world. **CHRIST ESTABLISHED THE CHURCH.**
- In the coming weeks, it is my prayer that we develop a much higher view of the Church and the Church's role in this world than we do now. I also pray that we learn this through the Words of Scripture and the working of the Holy Spirit.

- 
- This morning I would like to begin with an introduction to the Church. I would like to do so by examining the first of three points:

<b>I. The Foreshadowing of the Church</b>
---

<b>II. The Foundation of the Church</b>
---

<b>III. The Function and Purpose of the Church</b>
--

- It is interesting that the English word *church* is directed from the Greek work *kyriakos*, meaning “belonging to the Lord” (note the root, *kurios*).
- Robert Reymond notes that the Greek phrase *to kyriakon*, “came to be used to designate the place where Christians met to worship and in time was transferred also to the people themselves as the “spiritual building” of the Lord.”
- Consequently, the word **church** is used in our English translation of the Greek New Testament for the word *ekklesia*, which actually means “assembly.” [Note: the Greek word from which the English word “church” is derived is only used twice in the entire Greek New Testament.]
  - The word *ekklesia*, or “assembly” is actually used over 114 times in the New Testament, and it echoes the Old Testament origins in which the term and its full meaning are rooted.
  - Consider the words of Moses in **Exodus 12:16**:

“On the first day you shall hold a holy **assembly**, and on the seventh day a holy **assembly**. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you.” **[emphasis added]**

- 
- And, so we begin by examining the Old Testament to discover the origins of the “assembly” or what we call, today, the “church.” This will not be a fully exhaustive study, as such would be too long for our time allotted, but hopefully this will shed light on the beautiful continuity we see in the Scriptures regarding the people of God, or as *ekklesia* literally means, “[the ones] called out or summoned forth [into assembly].”

## I. The Foreshadowing of the Church

- It is critical that the modern-day Christian understand that the “Church” was not an after-thought of God, “Plan B,” or a parallel plan for the Gentiles in God’s Plan of Redemption.
- Rather, it was always God’s plan to unite the people of God as one “household of faith” through faith in Christ.
- **As Christians today who acknowledge Christ as the fulfillment of all that was written in the Old Testament, we should never interpret the Old Testament as though Christ never came.**
- **We must read the Old Testament in light of the New. This is the most basic element of a Christian, Christ-centered, Christ-exalting hermeneutic.**
- We learn this from the resurrected Christ, in Luke 24, when He teaches His disciples *how* to interpret the Old Testament:

**Luke 24:26-27, 44-47:** “<sup>26</sup> Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. . . <sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, <sup>46</sup> and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

---

### ❖ FOLLOWING THE FALL OF ADAM

- The revelation of God’s Plan of Redemption begins in **Genesis 3:15**, just after the Fall of Adam:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel.”

### ❖ THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

- But, then, we see this line of Redemptive continuity continue through Abraham:

**Genesis 12:1-3:** “Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

- The “promises of Abraham” were also given to Abraham along with his descendants. Yet, how do we reconcile this truth with the fact that he never owned one bit of Canaan?

- In Stephen’s speech before the Sanhedrin, he said:

“The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran,<sup>3</sup> and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.’<sup>4</sup> Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living.<sup>5</sup> **Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child.**”  
Acts 7:2b-5 [emphasis added]

- Consider, as well, the words of the author of Hebrews:

**Hebrews 11:8-16** [emphasis added]: “<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> **For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.** <sup>11</sup> By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. <sup>13</sup> **These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.** <sup>14</sup> For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> **But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.**”

**Hebrews 13:14:** “<sup>14</sup> For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.”

F.F. Bruce writes, “their [the patriarchs’] true homeland was not on earth at all. The better country on which they had set their hearts was the heavenly country. The earthly Canaan and the earthly Jerusalem were but temporary object-lessons pointing to the saints' everlasting rest, the well-founded city of God.”

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• And we, too [ethnic Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ], are inheritors of the Abrahamic covenantal promises.</li> </ul> |
|---|

## ❖ TRUE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM

- The Apostle Paul (an “ethnic” Jew of Jews!), writing *against* the Judaisers in Galatia wrote:

**Galatians 3:16**: “<sup>16</sup> Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.”

- In other words, **the promises of Abraham mean nothing apart from Christ!**

**Galatians 2:28-29**: “<sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.”

**Galatians 3:7**: “<sup>7</sup> Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” <sup>9</sup> So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

**Galatians 3:14**: “<sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”

## ❖ SIGN OF THE ABRHAMIC COVENANT: CIRCUMCISION

- Circumcision in the Old Testament was never intended to be the eternal “sign” of God’s grace. It was intended to foreshadow a much greater circumcision – the circumcision of the heart.

**Jeremiah 9:25**: <sup>25</sup> “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh

- And this truth is fulfilled ONLY in Christ:

**Romans 2:28-29**: “<sup>28</sup> For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. <sup>29</sup> But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.”

**Colossians 2:11**: “<sup>11</sup> In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,”

- Again, now that Christ has come, it is not the works of the flesh that matter (including circumcision), but rather the works of God that are appropriated by grace through faith in Christ.

**Ephesians 2:11-19**: “<sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,”

**Philippians 3:3**: “<sup>3</sup> For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—“

#### ❖ THE WRITINGS OF THE APOSTLE PETER:

**1 Peter 2:9**: “<sup>9</sup> 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.”

- In this passage, Peter uses Old Testament covenantal language and appropriates it to the Church.

**Exodus 19:5-6**: “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; <sup>6</sup> and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

**Deuteronomy 7:6**: “<sup>6</sup> “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”

---

#### ❖ THE SUCCESS OF GOD’S PROMISES HINGED COMPLETELY ON THE WORK OF CHRIST!

**Romans 8:37-9:8**: <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>1</sup> I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—<sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. <sup>5</sup> To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. <sup>6</sup> But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, <sup>7</sup> and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ <sup>8</sup> This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.”

- There is a true Israel within all of Israel, and not all Israel is Israel (according to the Apostle Paul).

John Murray writes, “The purpose of this distinction is to show that the covenantal promise of God did not have respect to Israel after the flesh but to this *true* Israel and that, therefore, the unbelief and rejection of ethnic Israel as a whole in no way interfered with the fulfillment of God's covenant purpose and promise. The word of God, therefore, has not been violated.”

Douglas Moo writes, “If the OT teaches that belonging to physical Israel in itself makes a person a member of God's true spiritual people, then Paul's gospel is in jeopardy. For were this the case, the gospel, proclaiming that only those who believe in Jesus Christ can be saved (cf. 3:20-26), would contradict the OT and be cut off from its indispensable historical roots. Paul therefore argues in [Romans 9] vv. 6b-29 that belonging to God's true spiritual people has always been based on God's gracious and sovereign call and not on ethnic identity. Therefore, God is free to 'narrow' the apparent boundaries of election by choosing only some Jews to be saved (vv. 6-13; 27-29). He is also free to 'expand' the dimensions of his people by choosing Gentiles (vv. 24-26).”

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Because Jesus Christ fulfilled all that Israel did not, and He was the only perfect Jew, the only way we can “preserve” true Judaism is by believing in Him. The true Jews are those who have faith in Christ and are “adopted” as sons through Him.</li></ul> |
|--|

- It does not get any clearer than this. **Either we are in Christ through faith, or we are not. Either we are part of the “true Israel of God through faith in Christ” or we are not.**

## ❖ NOT REPLACEMENT, BUT EXPANSION

- This is not what is referred to as “Replacement Theology.” Replacement Theology would suggest and declare that God abandoned the “olive tree” of Israel and replaced it with the [Gentile] Church. This he did NOT do.

**Ephesians 3:4-6**: “<sup>4</sup> When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

---

## ❖ ONE TREE, TWO TYPES OF BRANCHES

- There is one true Israel, the Church, that finds its roots and foundation in the Old Testament patriarchs and promises. In that one olive tree (Romans 11), there are the natural branches (the ethnic Jews) and the ones who have been grafted in (the Gentiles). This is the one “people of God” found in Christ.
  - This reflects a Christological perspective of Scripture. It is of supreme offense and blasphemy to Christ to suggest that anyone is included in the “household of faith,” “the family of God,” “the Israel of God,” etc. through any other means than by grace through faith in Christ alone.
- ❖ It is not by ethnicity, but by faith, and that faith is faith in Christ.

**Galatians 6:12-16**: “<sup>12</sup> It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. <sup>13</sup> For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. <sup>14</sup> But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. <sup>15</sup> For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. <sup>16</sup> And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”

**Romans 11:24-27**: “<sup>24</sup> For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree. <sup>25</sup> Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. <sup>26</sup> And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,  
“The Deliverer will come from Zion,  
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;



<sup>27</sup> “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

❖ **ALL ISRAEL WILL BE SAVED**

- With respect to God’s promises and His purposes, our great hope is that His will **WILL** be done on earth.
- God **will** save His people. This is what this particular text reminds us of.
- Paul’s point is clear: the Gentiles are of the “wild olive tree” whose branches are grafted into the “cultivated olive tree.” There has been a “partial hardening” of the ethnic Jews (i.e., many reject Christ in unbelief), and this “partial hardening” will continue until the “fullness of the Gentiles” come to faith in Christ.
  - What is interesting here, though, is that Paul does NOT say that the partial hardening will be lifted (although many assume this).
  - I believe the Apostle Paul’s point is that ALL Israel will be saved once the fullness of the Gentiles come in. At that point, God’s plan of Redemption will be successful and complete.
- Yet, once again, our great hope is that “**All Israel will be saved!**” And by “Israel” Paul means the “Israel of God” or the “covenant community” or the Church.
- And if there be any doubt as to the basis of the salvation of Israel, Paul, once again, quotes from the Old Testament (specifically it is a combination of Psalm 14:7; Isaiah 27:9, 59:20-21).

**Isaiah 59:20-21:** ““And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression,” declares the LORD.

<sup>21</sup> “And as for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD: “My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring,” says the LORD, “from this time forth and forevermore.”