

# What's So Special about the Church?

Ephesians 1-5

*Halifax: 28 March 2010*

## **Introduction:**

Today we have our annual congregational meeting.

- You may remember that last year, the elders ask me to preach a special sermon.
  - It was on Tithing.
  - The elders were concerned that some of you were not honouring the LORD with the first fruits of your increase,
    - and that in some cases it was due to a deficient understanding.
    - How glad they were when many of you responded in obedience.
- Today, the elders have asked me to speak on another specific topic that some do not have a good understanding about.
  - They have asked me to speak about importance of being a faithful and active member of the church of Jesus Christ.
    - As most of you know, we do not allow those who are not members in good standing of a faithful church to come to the Lord's Supper,
      - but some of you do not know why we require this—why we think it to be important.
      - And even if you do understand that, as most of you do, it is always our desire to strengthen your understanding and commitment.
  - It is important to understand that the New Testament has no concept of a person who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ living in isolation or separation from the church,
    - Yet, in our day, we run into this all the time.
    - By Jesus' command, the apostles went forth and established churches in every city, and those who came to believe became part of these churches.
      - These are the churches that the New Testament epistles were written to.
    - And these congregations were not just loose associations of believers...
      - The letters are addressed specifically to the church in Corinth or the church at Philippi or wherever as an organised body of believers.
      - It was assumed that these letters would be read when the congregation was gathered together as was their custom.
      - The Apostles laboured to see that elders were appointed in every congregation in accordance with the directives they received from Christ.

- and commanded that the members submit to the elders who ruled over them,
- and commanded the elders to give oversight to the members, even to watch for their souls, and remove those who did not continue in the faith.
- In other words, there was a God-ordained structure that these congregations were to follow—not a situation where everyone did what was right in His own eyes.
  - When the counsel met in Jerusalem, the directives were sent to all the churches—it was not a situation of random believers under no particular government or structure.
  - It seems that in the 60's a lot of people started getting the idea that it was more spiritual to have random believers floating around.
- In Revelation, the Lord rebukes some of the churches for their failure to remove those who did not continue in a credible profession of faith.
  - Throughout the New Testament, the distinction is made between those who are “in” the church and those who are “outside” of the church.
    - And these lines of membership are to be carefully drawn according to the directives of God's Word.
    - The Corinthians were rebuked for allowing an incestuous man to remain in the church and commanded to remove him, just as persons in the Old Testament were removed from the congregation.
  - It is, therefore, the duty of every person who comes to trust in Jesus Christ to unite with the visible church and to remain in the communion of that particular church.
    - That is why we do not allow those who are not members of any particular congregation to come to the Lord's Table.
    - We insist that if they are trusting in Jesus Christ, they need to come into the church that He has established and walk in communion with a congregation as a part of the body.
    - Jesus saves individuals, but whenever He saves anyone, that person is added to the church.
      - He is brought into the glorious fellowship of body of Christ and into living communion with the people who are visibly called out of the world by the gospel.
      - He is not to remain in isolation from the people of God.
- Of course there are many different branches of the Church throughout the world...

- Some of them are more faithful than others in that they have more consistently kept the Word.
  - They teach and practice what Jesus, the head of the church, has appointed.
    - Some branches of the church have so far departed from His way that they are dead and have even lost the very light of the gospel.
      - We know this is true because even while the apostles were still alive this happened.
  - It is also, therefore, the duty of every Christian to unite with a church that not only names Jesus Christ,
    - but that also confesses the truth and walks in what He has commanded.
    - Not that any congregation is perfect, but that there is an adherence to those things that are essential to the faith.
      - The New Testament is full of calls to exclude false teachers and believers are admonished not to submit to teaching that is not in accord with sound doctrine.
      - Even in the Old Testament, when Israel ceased to worship at Jerusalem under the rule of Jeroboam their king,
        - it was the duty of the faithful in Israel to leave that idolatrous worship of their own tribes and worship at Jerusalem.
        - It is our duty to leave an apostate church and unite with one that is faithful to the gospel.
          - Some of you have had to do that.
  - And because this is a duty of every Christian, we also exclude from communion those who are not members of a church that requires their members to confess the following (not the words but the substance):
    - Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His love and mercy?
    - Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of sinners, and do you trust in Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
    - Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the written Word of God, the only perfect rule of faith and practice?
    - Do you promise, in humble reliance upon the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavour to live as becomes the followers of Christ?
- But though we require this of those from other churches, we still recognise churches that have departed from a sound confession as part of the one church of Jesus Christ—part of the catholic or universal church.

- That is why we do not re-baptise those who have been baptised in these bodies.
- When Israel apostatised in the Old Testament under Jeroboam, the LORD still regarded them as His people—
  - They were in covenant with Him, but as those who were breaking His covenant, they had come under the curse of the covenant.
  - In the same way, we see apostate churches as also in covenant with God, but as transgressing the covenant and as in need of repentance.
    - For this reason, if there are members of this congregation who wish to transfer to a branch of the church that rejects the essentials of the faith,
      - we will not transfer them and if they go anyway, we will charge them with sin.
      - The same is true if they wish to withdraw from this congregation without transferring to any congregation at all.
        - The elders believe that it is our duty to officially declare that they are in sin and need to repent when they do not continue in some part of the church that at least holds to the essentials.

And so my brothers and sisters,

- today, I want to show you the importance of being an active faithful member of the visible church.
  - We want all you to understand that this is not optional for the believer or a matter of no real importance.
  - But let me say at the outset that this is not a sermon to defend the practice of church membership in the technical sense of why membership is biblical...
    - If you want something like that, I will direct you to the booklet on our literature table that deals with this matter.
    - But today in this message,
      - I am aiming more to show you that when the LORD saves us,
        - He brings us into the joyful communion of His church which is His body and that this is the place you ought to delight to be!
- To do this, I am going to take a very large passage of scripture—
  - In fact, I intend to look almost the entire book of Ephesians.
  - It has only been a little over a year ago that we completed a verse by verse exposition from Ephesians...
    - but today I want to show you an overview of this marvellous epistle that has so much to say about the church and the believer's place in it.

First of all, I want you to see that...

**I. The church is made up of those God has called together in Christ to save them from their sin.**

A. You can see this right from the beginning where Paul addresses them as “the saints who are in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.”

1. It is a remarkable thing that the apostle says here!

- The word “saints (hagioi)” means “holy ones”
  - It refers to those who are set apart to God—as His people, holy before Him.
- Paul is singling out a body of people in the city of Ephesus who are holy—they are saints!
- You can see in verse 4 how he declares to them that they are a people who were:
  - Eph 1:4: chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world that they should be holy and without blame before Him in love!
  - This is an amazing, wonderful thing for the apostle to say about these people!

2. Let me explain to you why this is such a remarkable thing!

a. All through Scripture, the LORD teaches us that He is holy and that those who approach Him must also be holy.

- He teaches us that He will destroy that which is not holy.
- In the Old Testament, the people had to go through rituals of purification before they could draw near to God in worship...
  - Sacrifices had to be offered regularly to atone for their sins and regulations had to be followed.
  - All this was to continually remind them that they were **not** holy and needed to be sanctified (or made holy) by the LORD if they were to be accepted by Him.

b. The Bible also continually teaches that we are not, by nature, holy, but sinful and defiled.

- Just like the people in the Old Testament, something has to be done to us to make us holy.
- Our native *unholiness* is brought out very clearly in Ephesians chapter 2 where Paul tells the Ephesians what they were before they became saints or holy ones...
  - Look at the first three verses:

- Eph 2:1-3: “And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”
- You need to understand that God is very intolerant of sin!
  - What Paul says about the Ephesians before they became saints is true of the whole world before they come to Christ.
    - We are all dead in trespasses and sins—spiritually dead—cut off from God by our sin.
    - We are under the dominion of Satan whom he calls the prince of the power of the air.
    - We lived according to the lusts or desires of the flesh instead of doing the will of God—selfish instead of giving our lives for each other.
      - and often so dead in our sin that we don’t even recognise how rotten we really are before a holy God.
  - And you see finally that it says we are (or were if we have become saints as the Ephesians had) by nature children of wrath...
    - they were not just unacceptable to God, but they were under His judicial wrath as those who were subject to His curse!
    - The LORD is very intolerant of sin!
      - Yes—I said *intolerant*.
- We often think of intolerance as a vice, but it can be a virtue.
  - For example, what would you think of parent of was tolerant about a day care that regularly beat and molested his children?
  - Or what would you think of a court of law that was tolerant of a man who went around the city with a chainsaw attacking people whose looks he did not care for.
  - Or what would you think of an owner of a meat packing plant that was tolerant of sloppy work that often caused his products to be contaminated...
    - You can see that intolerance can be a virtue...
- And with God, it is definitely a virtue!
  - If He were to be tolerant of evil, He would not be the pure and glorious God that He is—
    - It is His glory to hate wickedness...

- And whenever we sinful human beings (even the least sinful among us) ever have opportunity to see the glory of God,
  - we see immediately that we are complete undone—defiled and unclean—vile and loathsome before Him.
- When Isaiah or John beheld the glory of God, they did not say,
  - “How unreasonable God is,”
    - but they rather were in awe of His holiness and saw how defiled and unfit they were to be in His presence.
    - They saw that they were not holy...

TRANS> Such is our natural condition since the fall,

- yet here were these people in Ephesus that Paul calls saints—holy ones!
  - They were not at all holy by nature,
    - but dead in trespasses and sins, living apart from God, under the dominion of Satan, under the wrath of God...
    - That’s what it says in Eph 2:1-3,

c. But look! The Lord did something to change them! to make them holy!

- In verse 4&5 it tells us that God made them alive by His grace!
  - Eph 2:4-5: But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).
- And there are saints like this all over the world today!
  - God has gathered such persons together into His church from all over the world!
  - They are the ones who are called out from their various cities and communities to be holy—alive with Christ by grace!
  - Paul goes on to emphasise that it was God’s doing, not our own doing...
    - It was all by grace so that the praise goes to God.
- Just think of it!
  - They have been chosen in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world that they should be holy and without blame before God in love.
    - It is remarkable!
    - What a change!

B. Just look at what the LORD did to make us holy and acceptable who were dead in sin.

1. First, see that Christ is clearly the agent of our salvation.

- All through this letter, Paul speaks of this new life being “with Christ” and “in Christ” and “through faith in Christ.”
    - Jesus Christ, the Son of God is the Saviour who alone is able to bring sinful men and women out of death and condemnation before God and make them alive and accepted.
      - Ephesians 2:5 says we were made alive together with Christ...
      - Ephesians 2:6 says we were raised up with Him to sit together with Him in heavenly places...
      - Eph 2:7 speaks of God’s kindness toward us in Christ...
      - Eph 2:10 says that we were created in Christ Jesus...
    - And if you go back to chapter 1 again,
      - You see that in verse 4 where it says that He chose us in Christ that we should be holy and without blame,
        - Verse 5 says that we have been made accepted in Him.
    - Salvation is such a great work that no one who is less than God could accomplish it!
      - No one, but Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, is able to take ruined sinners and make them holy before God!
2. There are two principle things Jesus does to accomplish this.
- a. First, He redeems us through His blood...
- That is spoken of in chapter 1, verse 7.
    - Eph 1:7 “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”
  - You see that this “redemption through His blood” brings about “the forgiveness of sins.”
    - Redemption through His blood speaks of Jesus’ death on the cross.
      - It was a redemptive death—a death in which He was paying the penalty of sin for others.
      - In those days, if a person owed a debt, they would be sold as a slave, but if they had a rich friend,
        - their friend could come along and redeem them...
        - He would pay their debt and then set them free.
    - We already saw that before our holy God, we are defiled and unclean because of our sin—
      - We are rejected and condemned—under His wrath and curse.
      - But our dear Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to redeem us by dying on the cross for us...



- On the cross, He, the spotless Son of God, was rejected and condemned in our place...
  - He suffered the pains of Hell for us—the full penalty of our sin so that we could be released—redeemed!
- Chapter 2 also speaks of this glorious work, speaking of Christ, in 2:14, as “our peace”...
  - In verse 16, it says He reconciles both Jew and Gentile to God through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.
  - We were enemies of God (a dreadful thought),
    - but now those who are in Christ are reconciled to Him through the cross of Jesus.
    - He has done what had to be done in order that our sin might be fully pardoned!
      - It is because of the cross that we, who are defiled and sinful, are now accepted!
        - We are, as it says in Ephesians 1:6, “made accepted in the Beloved”—
          - in Jesus Christ, the crucified One!
          - We who were not holy at all are now holy.

TRANS> But there is something else that also had to be done for us.

- Certainly we had to be pardoned if we were to come to God...
    - but we also must be changed.
  - We were dead in trespasses and sins and did not love the true God.
    - We worshipped our own made-up gods—idols that are perversions of the true God...what we imagined God to be...
      - or we worshipped no God at all!
    - We lived according to the course of this world instead of doing the will of heavenly Father.
      - Something had to be done about that if we were going to be holy before God!
      - And something was done, through Jesus Christ!
- b. God made us alive in Jesus Christ!
- We already saw that in chapter 2, verse 5...
    - Eph 2:5: even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ... and raised us up together...

- Jesus took our sin and our sin took Him to the grave for us...
  - But it was only that He might rise again for us with life-giving power to bring us out of terrible deadness in sin...
    - the deadness we have with respect to our Creator.
- That is why verse 10 says that we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...
  - The power of Christ's resurrection is producing in us a whole new life so that we are able to live unto God—
    - to respond to Him, to obey Him, to live according to His will!
- In Eph 2:11-13, Paul talks about how there was this hostility between the Jews and the other nations (the other nations are called Gentiles)
  - The nations were hostile because they were not reconciled to God—only the Jews were...
    - And because the Gentiles hated the true God, they hated His people.
- But now that Jesus has come,
  - He not only reconciles us to God, but also to each other!
    - Now believing Jews and believing Gentiles are brought together.
  - He has formed a new community, empowered by His grace and resurrection life,
    - to live together according to God's will...
    - to be a holy people in this sinful world!
- Look at Ephesians 2:19-22:
  - Eph 2:19-22: "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."
  - Isn't that marvellous?
    - The church of Jesus Christ is God's household—the place where He lives!
      - And we are growing into a holy temple for Him...
        - We are empowered to live together in accordance with God's will...
        - To love one another as Christ has loved us and to give our lives for one another the way Jesus gave His life for us!

TRANS> What a marvellous thing God has done in His church!

- Here are the people He has called out from a life of death in sin to be holy and accepted in Jesus Christ!
  - This is the true gospel—gospel means good news!

## **II. The church is called together to delight in the good news (of sin dealt with)**

A. In Ephesians, Paul leads us into the praise of God for the gospel

1. He keeps on talking about how all that God has done for us in Christ brings praise to God for His grace!

- In chapter 1, after telling us how God has made us holy and accepted through Christ,
  - he says in verse 6, “to the praise of the glory of His grace!”
  - and in verse 7, he says that our redemption is according to “the riches of God’s grace”
  - And in verse 12, he says that we have trusted in Christ are “for the praise of His glory,”
  - And in chapter 2, verse 7, he speaks of “the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”
  - And in chapter 3, he speaks of how it is his great privilege to be appointed to preach “the unsearchable riches of God’s grace”
    - And where are the riches displayed?
      - They are displayed in the whole world through the church that He has redeemed!
        - Eph 3:21 says, “to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever.”
        - The glory is seen in God bringing us together by His grace.
- Paul can’t get over how kind in gracious God has been in all that He has done for His church!
  - For God to take rebellious sinners who hate Him and who repulse Him because of their wickedness...
    - and to bring them life and forgiveness through His only Son!
    - to actually go way out of His way to form a whole world-wide community of people that is reconciled to Him...
      - a people that is made holy and without blame before Him, not by their own works,
        - but entirely by His grace in Jesus Christ!
        - Such kindness is unfathomable! It is stupendous! It is marvellous!

2. Paul yearns for the church to grasp how great the gospel is!
  - a. In reading Ephesians, it always strikes me how much Paul wants us to see the greatness of what God has done!
    - Paul had been up to heaven in his visions and had seen the glory of God...
      - And it just blew him away that this holy God should save sinful human beings like us—
        - He understood much of what a stupendous task it was for Him to save us—what grace had been extended to us!
    - And you get the impression that Paul looks at the Ephesians and other believers,
      - and he realises that they don't really grasp the greatness of what God has done!
      - He knows that Jesus Christ has called us together in our assemblies to declare to us what God has done and to give thanks to Him for it...
        - We give thanks for our salvation each Lord's Day in our assembly!
          - But we are rather dull about it all.
      - And Paul is saying,
        - "Oh that you could just see how great this salvation really is!"
        - He is so thankful for what God has done for His people,
          - and he wants them to just see how great it is!
  - b. This yearning for us to see is brought out all the way through Ephesians, but especially it is brought out in two places...
    - 1) In Ephesians 1:17-23, he prays that the church will understand that the very same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in them...
      - This very same power that raised Jesus is working in us to make us like Him...pure, holy, undefiled!
      - Paul says, "Oh that you would understand and see the power that is at work in you—the same that raised Jesus from the dead!"
      - Here, let me read a couple of verses to you:
        - In Eph 1:17, we have his prayer:
          - "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from

the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

- What encouragement for us!
  - This very same power is at work in us—
  - What hope there is that God will form us into the new community of righteousness that He has promised.
  - Pray that our eyes will indeed be opened that we might be filled with praise and thanksgiving and hope!

TRANS> Paul’s second prayer of yearning is found at the end of chapter 3.

2) In Ephesians 3:14-21, he prays that we might be brought into the fullness of the life that God has for us...

- And in verses 17-19, He prays especially that Christ would dwell in us such that we would come to understand His great love toward us in the gospel...
  - Here is the One who bore God’s wrath and curse to redeem us!
    - You need to *appreciate* what He has done... to *comprehend* it with the rest of the church!
    - The words are:
      - Eph 3:17-19: that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
  - The longer I go on as a Christian, the more I realise how important this is...
    - We can know all the doctrines, but the question is, do we really appreciate what God has done
      - Do we understand how great His love toward us really is!
      - You can tell by looking at how much you grumble.
        - Israel grumbled in the wilderness even though they were under the glory cloud because they had not appreciation for the glory cloud.
      - You can also tell how much you appreciate what Christ has done by looking at how cheerful you are about laying down your life for Jesus Christ who laid down His life for you.

TRANS> My friends,

B. If you really understand the gospel, you will live joyfully in the unity of the church!

1. You have been called out from this world to live as a holy community in Jesus Christ.
  - Remember, the church is the assembly of those who are called out...
    - That is what the word means—the assembly of called out ones...
    - Every congregation is called out, just like the Ephesians were, to live together in the unity of the gospel!
      - in praise to God for the gospel and in love for each other.
      - You can't do that if you isolate yourselves from faithful believers.
  - In chapter 4 of Ephesians, Paul urges us to live in the way that those who have been called out to be holy to God ought to live...
    - and it is life in community with others requiring sacrifice and humility and patience because we are not yet made perfect!
      - Eph 4:1-6: "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all."
      - You see that there is this need to bear with one another.
  - In the first three chapters, Paul has told us what God did to save us and form us into a holy community in Jesus Christ,
    - And now he urges us to live as that new community—
      - to walk worthy of what God has called us to be as a people who are reconciled to God and to each other.
  - He emphasises that there is only one church.
    - Jesus Christ is the head and we are the members.
    - Our unity is found in our mutual submission to Him as our Lord and Saviour.
      - And you see that we cannot live in isolation from each other as brothers and sisters—and especially we cannot live in isolation from Christ.
        - We are a body, joined to Christ and to each other in Him to live as a redeemed community in our city.

- I should point out here that it is also the pattern given to us in the New Testament that there are to be many local congregations in each place.
    - The Church at Ephesus was not one big congregation, but many little congregations throughout the region.
      - And each congregation had its own elders as we are shown in Paul's letter to Timothy who laboured at Ephesus.
      - We should not suppose that we must all attend the same congregation to have unity...
        - the church is made up of many congregations all over the world.
    - Ideally we should all be together under a common confession, but because of sin, this is not possible,
      - for we live within the same tension as the churches of the New Testament where some teachers had to be excluded for their false teaching...
        - and of course these teachers did not disappear, but formed other congregations based on their false teaching.
      - There is much more I could say about this subject,
        - But the point is that we are to live in community in our local area with others who are called out to serve God.
      - The New Testament never envisions individual Christians who are not serving together with other Christians under the care of elders.
        - In Titus, Paul suggests that a congregation is not yet established until elders are ordained in it...
          - that is why Paul made it his practice to return to all the places he had ministered to see churches were organised with their own elders.
          - His practice is described in Acts 14:23.
    - But back to the main point...
      - Chapter 4 marks a turning point
        - In chapters 1-3, Paul has told us all about what God has done for us in Christ to save us from sin,
          - now he tells us how we are to live out our new life in Christ together in the unity of the gospel.
2. There are two aspects to the unity that we are to live in and will live in if we truly understand the gospel.
- a. First, we will live in the unity of the truth of the gospel.

- 1) Paul talks about this in chapter 4, verses 7-16.
    - He explains that when Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave His church ministers of the word as a gift.
      - Verse 11 says that He gave:
        - Eph 4:11: “some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.”
    - These are all ministers of the word whose task it is to bring us the gospel.
      - The apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church (as Paul said in chapter 2:20) because they give us the word of God in the first place.
      - They left for the church in all ages an infallible record of all that Christ did for us and of what it means to us...
        - They were immediately inspired by the Holy Spirit so that all their words are utterly trustworthy and are God-breathed.
      - This very letter to the Ephesians is an example as are all the other writing of the New Testament that the church has recognised and received as the Word of God.
        - It is in these writings that we now have preserved for us the truth of the gospel,
          - and it is by receiving these writings as the Word of God and believing them and submitting to them that we have unity in the truth.
      - The evangelists and pastors and teachers are also ministers of the word, but they are not immediately inspired.
        - Christ gives them to His people to preach the word of the apostles so that successive generations may hear and receive the message.
          - It is their task to give the sense of the scriptures and apply them to each generation.
          - Unity is maintained when they speak what is in agreement with God’s written word given to us in Scripture...
            - and it is our duty to test them to see that they do.
- 2) You can see how Paul explains that the purpose of these ministers of the word is to bring us more and more into unity in the truth of the gospel...
    - In 4:12-13, He explains that Christ gave them to us:
      - Eph 4:12-13: for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;



- The goal is for us to have a mutual understanding and an ever deepening understanding of the faith and knowledge of Christ!
    - Just what Paul was talking about in the first three chapters...
      - that we would grasp the marvellous grace of God who sent His Son to save us from our sins!
      - This is the unity that we are to grow into together!
- 3) And this is where it is our duty, in the pursuit of unity, to pursue the truth of God's word.
- If you understand what God has done to save us,
    - you will not accept false teaching because of your love for the gospel!
    - You want everyone to know the true gospel and you will not tolerate a false gospel!
  - That means that when men come along and teach another gospel that is not according to the truth of the Word...
    - as so many have done throughout the history of the church...
      - you will not submit to them and you will even expose them.
  - These false teachers come into the church and they change the message of the gospel...
    - They know that the message that we are all dead in trespasses and sins and under the wrath of God apart from Jesus crucified is not a popular message.
    - They know that people do not like this message.
    - They want to flatter people and tell them that they are okay apart from the gospel.
      - So they make Jesus into nothing more than a fine example and a fine teacher.
        - A lot of people like that because they don't want to see the ugliness of their sin or think about their need of a real saviour.
    - But in trying to be nice and soften the message,
      - these teachers are in fact being very cruel because they keep men from finding the true way of salvation that they so desperately need.
      - They leave people alienated from God and without any real hope (only a deceptive hope).

- And so I say that if you love the gospel,
  - you will unite with a church that is united in the truth—
    - that holds to the Bible as God’s word...
    - and to Christ as the only way of salvation...
  - You will have no tolerance for those who distort the truth about the Saviour you so dearly love—
    - who has loved you so much that He bore the pains of Hell for you!
  - They will tell you that you are being divisive and that Jesus taught us to be unified as one...
    - but the truth is, they are the ones who are being divisive because they are departing from the basis of our unity which is the truth of the gospel.
    - It is so sad to see how many feel that it is their duty to remain in a congregation or a denomination that has denied the truth in the name of unity...
      - It is just the opposite...
        - By remaining in an apostate church, such persons are in fact promoting division.
        - Unity is found in the faithful adherence to the truth of the gospel...
        - There is only one Lord and one faith.

TRANS> So truth, unity in the faith, is the first aspect of the unity that we will live in as a church if we love the gospel.

b. The second aspect is the outliving of the gospel in the imitation of Christ.

1) Negatively, this means that we will no longer walk as the nations walk...

- living according to their own desires and ideas...
  - following their passions and futile way of thinking.
- There is whole new way of life for the believer, finding out what the will of God is and living accordingly.
  - God delivers us from the old way.
  - The gospel empowers us to live a new life by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead!
    - As we have seen, we are now a holy dwelling place for God!
- Listen to how Paul puts in Ephesians 4:17-24:

- “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”
- We have a whole new life to live now—a glorious life in the gospel!

TRANS> Negatively, we will no longer live as we did when we were dead in trespasses and sins...

2) Positively, we will become imitators of Jesus Christ.

- This is expressly stated in chapter 5
  - In Eph 5:1, Paul says:
    - Eph 5:1-2: “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.”
  - It is a marvellous aspect of God’s grace that we can even think about doing such a thing!
    - To love as Christ has loved us!
      - We are talking about that love that made Him lay down His life to save us when we had done nothing to deserve it and everything to provoke Him to anger and contempt.
      - We are to live in a community where we are all about laying down our lives sacrificially for each other...
        - Every day!
    - And God promises that the grace we have now is but the beginning—but a down payment of what we will have in heaven...
      - It is our glorious hope that we will eventually be just like Christ, having the same love.
      - Can you imagine what that would be like?
        - with everybody giving themselves for each other all the time to the glory of God!

3) Paul talks about all kinds of very real changes that will occur...

- Instead of lying we will speak the truth...
- Instead of anger that attacks and destroys others, we will have anger that attacks and solves problems...
- Instead of always trying to take more, we will be fixated on serving and giving.
- Instead of speaking corrupt words, we will speak gracious words that edify...
- Instead of bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking and malice,
  - we will be kind one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other even as God has forgiven us.
- Instead of sexual perversity and covetousness, there will purity and gratitude that promotes love and life...
- Instead of drunkenness, there will be praise and thanksgiving...
- And all of our relationships, when we are living under the gospel, will be totally transformed...
  - Both at home and in the work place.
  - The bottom line is that we will be living in the imitation of Jesus Christ...
    - loving as He loved.
      - We are so delighted with what He has done that, by the grace of God, we start to become like Him!

TRANS> So you see the glorious community life that God calls us into!

- A life of unity in the truth.
- And a life of obedience to the will of God in imitation of Jesus Christ.
  - This is our life together as brothers and sisters in the church—with those whom God has called out to be His own people!

## **Conclusion**

You see from all this that you must ever live in the church that Jesus Christ has established.

- That is why the elders of Covenant Reformed will pursue you and seek to win you back if any of you should ever decide to depart from the church of Jesus Christ...
  - if you should isolate yourself from the community of God's people...
  - or if you should decide to unite with a church that does not preach the true gospel of Jesus Christ.
- We will try to call you back to the Lord Jesus,
  - We will try to help you understand the place of the gospel in your life,
  - And if you still refuse to hear us,
    - we will have to declare that you are in sin and that your sins are bound to you until you repent and that you are not to partake of the Lord's Supper or be considered as among the people of God.
  - I will have more to say about this this afternoon.