



Christ's Living Church

A Journey
from Then
to Now



Ronald L. Scheuers



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Rev. Ronald L. Scheuers

Christ's Living Church: A Journey from Then to Now

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Rev. Ronald Scheuers
January 2011

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My wife, Faye, read and edited this material with interest and encouragement, and helped me to write more clearly. For her gracious and joyful help and honesty I am very thankful. She understands the challenge to compress thousands of years of church history into so few lessons. She is truly my sister in Christ and loving partner.

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I will always stand amazed that Christ has made me a living member of His church, rescuing me from the fallen human race and preserving me for Himself. It is this wonderment that I want the readers to experience. I give thanks to God that through the writing of this volume He has deepened my understanding of His marvelous work in His Flock, drawn me closer to His heart, and called me to greater devotion to His Bride.

Rev. Ronald Scheuers
January 2011

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LESSON 1

What Is the Church?

GETTING STARTED

What a great day it was when the school year was finally finished! You had been planning your family's summer vacation for a long time. You anticipated the scenic stops along the way, the museums you wanted to explore, and the fun-filled visits with your cousins. Sometimes you camped a day or two. Then you stayed with your relatives for a few nights. The days and miles flew by as you experienced new adventures each day.

This book will take us on an extended trip together. We will follow a family on the longest journey that people have ever taken. It is the long trek that God's family has taken from the beginning of the world until the present, a journey from then to now. It is the story of God's work for and in His church.

CREATION, FALL, AND REDEMPTION

It all began at the beginning of time. We cannot understand the story of the church unless we begin with the **creation** of all things. God's creation was perfect. There was no sin in God's beautiful world. God made man to know, love, and serve Him as the Ruler of all things. Adam, the very first man, served God perfectly. Everything he did brought glory to God.

Then God's whole world was ruined by man's **fall into sin**. During your devotions read Genesis 3. It tells us that Adam and Eve listened to Satan's temptations and sinned against God by disobeying His command. They broke their friendship with God. Their minds and hearts became evil. Because God had appointed Adam to represent the human race, when Adam fell into sin, we all inherited his sinful nature. Therefore, by nature we all stand guilty before God. We hate God and our neighbor. All of us need to be saved from the wrath of God against our sin.

Because of Adam's disobedience, God's creation also was marred by sin. God said to Adam in Genesis 3:17, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life."

The story of the church is the account of how God takes some people out of the fallen human race and saves them from His wrath against sin. In His grace and by Christ's work, He restores them to His fellowship. He forgives them and makes them His children, His family, His church. In His love and grace He determined to **redeem** or purchase a people who would live for His glory. Those people are His church. Did God abandon His creation after it was spoiled by man's sin? No. In His mercy He determined to renew His creation and cleanse it from sin. Second Peter 3:13 says that, "in keeping with his promise we are looking forward

to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." As His church, we will live in the new heaven and the new earth.



THINKING CAREFULLY

1. According to Genesis 3:18–19, how did Adam's fall into sin affect the creation?

2. How do the Bible's themes of creation, fall, and redemption help you to understand what the church is?

FOR MEMORY



John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Belgic Confession, Article 28

We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and outside of it there is no salvation, that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself.

Heidelberg Catechism

54Q. What do you believe concerning the "holy catholic church"?

A. I believe that the Son of God, through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life

Westminster Confession of Faith, XXV, 1

The church "... consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all."

PICTURES OF THE CHURCH

Today we use the word “church” to mean different things. We say, “Let’s go to church.” We probably mean, “Let’s go to the church **building** and join the **group of local believers** who worship there.” Sometimes we talk about a certain **denomination**, a group of churches that share the same views and confessions. Most important, however, we must remember that the church is **people**, that is, **all true believers in Jesus Christ**. They are people who have been given a new heart, life, and relationship with God. Because Christ has forgiven them, they have the Holy Spirit living in them.

The Bible paints for us a number of pictures of the church which help us understand what the church is and what God intends the church to be. First of all, the Bible describes the church as a **flock**. A flock consists of sheep that belong to a shepherd. The shepherd cares for, feeds, leads, and protects his flock. We are the flock; Christ is our Shepherd. He knows what we need, so He provides all the things that will be good for us. Our Shepherd corrects us when we wander away from Him. He protects us so that we will never be lost. As the Good Shepherd, He gave His life for us who are His sheep. In Acts 20:28 the elders of the church are encouraged, “Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” Jesus said to his followers, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

The church is also Christ’s **bride**. In Revelation 21:9 an angel told the apostle John, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” Jesus is the bridegroom, and His church is the beautiful bride loved by Him and called to always be faithful to Him. Christ cares for the church and protects her from Satan who constantly tries to destroy her and steal her away from the Lord’s side.

Christ also describes His church as **branches**. In this picture, Christ is the vine and we are the branches. Branches stay alive only when they are connected to the vine. If they are broken off, the branches die. Branches draw their strength, life, and nourishment from the vine. Jesus said in John 15:5, 6, and 8, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

The Bible also describes the church as a **temple** or **holy building** in which God dwells. Ephesians 2 tells us that the foundation of this temple is “the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (verse 20), and “in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (verse 22). The Holy Spirit builds this temple as He makes us “living stones . . . built into a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5). The Lord lives in us, His temple, completely dedicated to His purposes and glory.

Finally, the church is like a **body**. We read in 1 Corinthians 12:27, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” And in Romans 12:4–5, the Bible says, “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” These verses tell us about the *unity* of the church, for there is one body

called the church. The Scriptures tell us that Christ is the head of His body, the church. Therefore, He directs, governs, and gives life to His church. These verses tell us how important each member is in the church. They tell us how necessary it is for all of us to use our gifts and talents as we work together for the good of the church. If we have different backgrounds, abilities, and needs, can we still work together in harmony? Yes! God wants each of us to use our abilities for His glory and to meet each other's needs. We are the body of Christ. We are the church.



THINKING CAREFULLY

3. The Bible gives us some "pictures" of the church. Name four of them.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

4. In what ways is the church like a flock? _____

5. How is the church like a bride? _____

6. How necessary is it for branches to remain connected to a vine? Why?

Since Christ pictured the church as branches, what does the church receive from the vine?

7. Cyprian once said, "He cannot have God for his Father who has not the Church for his mother." What do you think he meant?

- a. It is necessary for me to be an active part of the worshiping church.
- b. Outside of the church there is no salvation.
- c. I must not go off by myself and think that I can be a "loner Christian."
- d. All of the above.

8. Since the church is a body, how must the various parts of the body behave?

THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

Have you ever read about the kingdom of God in your Bible? Perhaps you have read that beautiful Psalm that says, "The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all" (Psalm 103:19). Or maybe your pastor preached on Psalm 145:10–13 which proclaims,

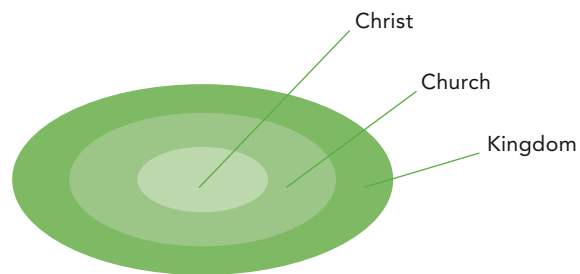
All you have made will praise you, O LORD;
your saints will extol you.
They will tell of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might,
so that all men may know of your mighty acts
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures through all generations.

In the New Testament, Jesus often spoke about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. The gospel of Mark (Mark 1:14–15) tells us that Jesus began "proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'" In the first three gospels we find almost one hundred references to the kingdom of God.

So, what is the **kingdom of God**? To put it simply, *the kingdom of God is His rule or reign over everything, especially over the hearts and lives of His redeemed people as they live in His world.* From the Bible we learn that the kingdom of God is eternal or everlasting (Psalm 145:13). It is a **spiritual kingdom**, not ruling a particular country or piece of territory. Jesus said to Pilate in John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." Citizens of God's kingdom must always obey the King and work hard to promote His kingdom. First Corinthians 10:31 commands, "whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." We read in Colossians 3:23–24, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. . . . It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

Is the kingdom of God the same as the church? To be sure, all people who belong to Christ are His church. God's people gather together for worship each Sunday. During worship His people are taught to live out their faith every day in obedience to God in His kingdom. Having worshiped, the people of God go out into the world to serve the King and to spread the gospel of Christ. God wants His reign to be seen and acknowledged in every part of life. In their work, play, education, leisure, politics, and family life, believers must live under the rule or kingship of Jesus Christ. Everyday activities cannot be lived apart from Christ's reign. Every thought, deed, and word is to be brought under the lordship or kingship of Jesus Christ.

The following diagram helps us to understand the difference between the church and the kingdom. In the center is Jesus Christ. To Him belong the church and the kingdom. He empowers both the church and the kingdom by His Word and Spirit. As you see, however, the kingdom is wider than the church, because the kingdom is seen wherever the rule of Christ is exercised through the lives of His people in the world.



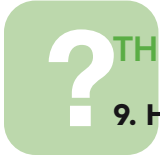
Well, the journey has begun. Who are the people on this journey? They are the church, God's people who have been saved by grace through faith in Christ. Who is traveling with them and in front of them to lead the way? It is the Lord Himself. If you are a person who has Christ living in you, then you are traveling on this journey too. In our lessons this year, we will make stops along the way and see what God has done for His church. Enjoy the journey!

KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS

Creation, Fall, Redemption – These are key themes of the Bible that describe the story of the church and Christ's work for all believers.

The Church – God's church is His people in every age saved by the work of Christ.

God's Kingdom – The kingdom of God is His rule or reign in the hearts and lives of His people as they live in His world.



THINKING CAREFULLY

9. How are the church and the kingdom of God the same? _____

How are they different? _____

10. How does belonging to God's kingdom influence our work, education, and play?

LESSON 2

The Church in the Old Testament

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

The family of God, or the church, which we are following on our journey from then to now, had a very important beginning. As we follow its path, we will stop to see some of the disappointments, failures, battles, and victories of God's people. We will see God's loving care for them along the way. However, before we study their experiences on this journey, we must explore the beginning. Where did the church begin? How did the journey get started?

A GRACIOUS COVENANT

The story of God's people in the world begins with His beautiful creation. The Lord made all things perfect at the very beginning. The first man, Adam, and his wife, Eve, were perfect and they enjoyed fellowship with God. Genesis 1:27 says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." To be made in **God's image** means that people are like God in some ways.

What do we see when we look into a mirror? We see a real picture or reflection of ourselves. We see our **image**. Because we are made in God's image, we reflect what God is like. God is holy, and therefore Adam was holy. God knows all things, and therefore Adam could know God and experience friendship with Him. Adam could know the difference between right and wrong. The Lord rules over all things, and therefore Adam was given the task of ruling over God's creation for His glory. The animals are not given these abilities. Only people are made in the image of God.

Adam was also given the duty to obey God. The great Creator came to Adam and made a **covenant** with him. A covenant is an agreement or a bond that holds two parties together. It is a relationship in which promises are made and duties are given to both parties. In this covenant with God, Adam had the duty to obey God in everything. God promised that if Adam obeyed Him perfectly, he would live forever. We call this agreement **the covenant of works**. Adam would be blessed with eternal life with God if he obeyed. However, he would be cursed with eternal death if he disobeyed.

Then something very tragic happened. Adam and Eve broke this special agreement or covenant by disobeying God. They sinned against Him. Genesis 3 tells us they were guilty before God; then they tried to hide from Him. What great sadness, tragedy, disaster, and death came into God's perfect creation! God had warned them that if they disobeyed Him they would "surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Now only death awaited Adam because he had broken God's covenant. How deeply this must have grieved the Creator!

Yet, in His perfectly wise plan, God would not allow all to be lost. He had already planned, in His mercy and grace, to make another covenant with Adam and Eve and with all believers and their children. In the **covenant of grace**, God Himself provided Someone to obey perfectly in our place. There is only one Person in all of history who could and did obey God perfectly. God's own Son, Jesus Christ, perfectly obeyed all of God's law in our place while He was here on earth. Then He took the punishment for our sin by dying on the cross, and He rose again from the dead.

God tells us that all who trust in Christ for eternal life will be His people forever. This is because God the Father looks at Jesus' perfect obedience and sacrifice in our place, and He is satisfied. He no longer sees our sin. He sees us as washed clean by Jesus' blood and covered with His righteousness. He justifies us, that is, He declares us to be right with God, perfect in His sight. So the beautiful relationship with God that was broken in the Garden of Eden is now restored. Jesus makes us right with God. He does in the covenant of grace what we could not do in the covenant of works. God said in 2 Corinthians 6:16, "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." This promise is the heart of the covenant of grace.

That's where it all began. The journey of the church is the journey of all those who believe in Jesus' saving work. They trust the promises God made in the covenant of grace. Since we cannot save ourselves from sin, we trust in Jesus to save us. So, the church began when the first Old Testament believers trusted in Christ for eternal life. It started in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve!



THINKING CAREFULLY

1. What does it mean that you are made in God's image? _____

2. Name three ways in which we are like God.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

3. What is a covenant? What covenants are commonly used today?

4. In the covenant of works, what was Adam's duty? _____

What was God's promise? _____

What was God's curse? _____

5. True or False

- a. _____ God made Adam and Eve sin against Him.
- b. _____ Death was a result of the fall into sin.
- c. _____ Adam and Eve felt no guilt after the fall.
- d. _____ Adam and Eve wanted to talk with God after the fall.

6. In the covenant of grace, what things does Jesus do for us that we cannot do for ourselves?

7. When did the church begin? Circle the right answer.

- a. after Jesus ascended into heaven
- b. sometime between the Old and New Testaments
- c. when the first believer in the Old Testament trusted in Christ
- d. when Paul, the apostle, first preached to the Gentiles

THE OLD TESTAMENT CHURCH

Soon after Adam and Eve fell into sin, God made a promise to them so they would know that Christ was coming. Read Genesis 3:15. Who is the seed of the woman? Who is the serpent? Who will win the struggle between them? This verse tells us that Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman, would be coming some day to gain the victory over sin, death, and Satan. Do you see how important that promise was for Adam and Eve? Think about how comforting this promise was for all the people who believed in God prior to Jesus' coming. The church began with people living in the Old Testament who looked forward in faith to Jesus' coming. They trusted God's covenant promise.

How did Old Testament believers express their trust in God and His promises? Because the people **believed in God's promise that Christ would come**, they **talked to God in prayer**. Genesis 4:26 tells us, "At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD." Later, in

the days of the tabernacle and temple, the smoke of burning incense rose up to heaven. This showed that the prayers of believers were going up to God.

In obedience to God, early believers also **offered sacrifices to God**. The Bible tells us that Adam's son, Abel, offered a sacrifice to God. He believed in God's promise of eternal life. "By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings" (Hebrews 11:4). In the time of Moses, animals were killed in the place of the people to show that Jesus would die for His church. The blood of the lambs was shed to help people see that Jesus, the Lamb of God, would shed His blood for them. Many offerings were presented in the tabernacle and the temple, and they all pointed to the one sacrifice that Christ would make for us.

The early church also **received the Word of God**. Sometimes God spoke to His people directly, as He did to Samuel in 1 Samuel 3. At other times He spoke through preachers. As Noah built the ark, God used him as "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5) who brought a message of repentance to the wicked people of his day. God also spoke through His written Word. Moses was used by God to write down the first five books of the Old Testament. God also used many prophets who received dreams and visions. They told people of the early church what He wanted them to believe and do. In all of these ways the people received the Word of their covenant God. And all of those who believed His Word are His church.



THINKING CAREFULLY

8. List three things Old Testament believers did to express their trust in God.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

9. All of the sacrifices, priests, ceremonies, and furniture of the tabernacle and temple pointed to whom?

How did they do this? _____

FOR MEMORY



2 Corinthians 6:16

We are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Heidelberg Catechism

54Q. *What do you believe concerning the "holy catholic church"?*

A. *I believe that the Son of God, through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself, a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith. And of this community I am and always will be a living member.*

Heidelberg Catechism

60Q. *How are you right with God?*

A. *Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me ... and even though I am still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ*

Westminster Larger Catechism

62Q. *What is the visible church?*

A. *The visible church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children.*

KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS

Image of God – In some ways we are like God. Adam was made with true knowledge of God, holiness, and the task and ability to rightly rule the world for God. After sin came into the world, the image of God in man was marred and spoiled but not lost entirely.

Covenant – A covenant is an agreement or bond that holds two parties together. It includes both promises and duties for both parties in that covenant.

Covenant of Works – The covenant of works was originally made with Adam. If he obeyed God perfectly, he would have eternal life. If he disobeyed God, he would receive the curse of the covenant, namely death.

Covenant of Grace – God made the covenant of grace with believers and their children after the fall into sin. God provided His Son, Jesus Christ, who would perfectly obey His Father and die in our place to redeem us from God's wrath against our sin. We receive the blessings of the covenant of grace by faith alone.

PEOPLE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT CHURCH

Who were some of the people in the Old Testament church? Before the flood they included believers like Abel, Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, and Noah. There were not many people who loved God and trusted His covenant promise at the time of the flood. You will remember that God saved only Noah and his family. They were the only church members on the earth at that time.

After the flood the Bible presents Job who trusted in God. Then the Bible focuses on Abraham and his family. Genesis 12:1 tells us the command that God gave Abram (or Abraham as he was later called): "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." God made His covenant of grace with Abraham and his family (Genesis 17). Abraham believed in God and trusted His covenant promises. He too was part of the church. The Bible calls him the "father of all who believe" (Romans 4:11).

God also included Abraham's son, Isaac, so that he believed God's promise of the coming Savior. Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob believed God's covenant promises, but Esau scorned them. Jacob was part of the early church. Jacob, or Israel as God called him, had twelve sons. The church was beginning to grow with his large family. Later, during a severe famine, Jacob and his family left the land God had promised to Abraham and moved to Egypt where they multiplied into a great nation. God had promised that He would bring them back to Canaan (Genesis 46). But how did they get back to the Promised Land? The book of Exodus tells us how God used Moses to miraculously lead them out of Egypt and through the desert for many years until they came to the borders of Canaan. God's people were a "congregation in the desert" (Acts 7:38).

The church marched on. In the days of the judges and kings, many believed God's promises even though others in the nation rejected them. King David loved and served God. Elijah, the prophet, was faithful despite great opposition. The prophet Isaiah told of Christ's coming. Daniel served the Lord faithfully even when he and the Israelites were captives in Babylon. For seventy years they were prevented from returning to Jerusalem where they had once worshiped and served the Lord. Again and again the prophets promised the church that Christ, the Messiah, was coming. And all who put their hope in Him were part of the church.

Finally, in the fullness of time, the Messiah was born. Christ Jesus binds the church of the Old and New Testaments together as one. The church of the Old Testament **looked forward** in faith to Christ as they trusted in His perfect work. The church of the New Testament **looks back** in faith to His perfect work. There is **one church** in God's world reaching from creation to the end of time. This church, Christ's church, is made up of all believers throughout history. As part of that church, we are all bound together to Christ by true faith in Him and in His covenant promises. That's why Galatians 3:29 says, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Messiah? If you do, then you are part of the church!



THINKING CAREFULLY

10. Name seven people who belonged to the early or Old Testament church.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

f. _____

g. _____

What was true of all of them?

11. How is the Old Testament church different from the New Testament church?

How are they the same? _____

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