



In Search of the Old Paths

“Let the Church Be the Church”

Ephesians 3:1-21

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While using the Apostle's Creed as our outline, the purpose of this series of sermons is to affirm and illuminate the essential doctrines of the Christian faith as defined in the lives and teachings of those who saw the resurrected Lord.

- These core doctrines have not changed, nor have they evolved in their meaning, or adapted to fit the culture.
- These core doctrines were predicated by God the Father, prophesied by the prophets, proven by God the Son, proclaimed by the apostles in the power of the Holy Spirit, and preached to the whole world by those whose lives were radically transformed by their faith in them.
- In Jude 20-21, the Apostle said Christians of every generation must contend for “the faith” that was handed down to the saints by, ***“Building yourselves up on***

your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.”

In Ephesians 3, God revealed a truth to the Apostle Paul that had been hidden for many generations; that God’s ultimate plan of redemption was to include both Jew and Gentile into one body.

- Since there was such hostility between the Jews and the Gentiles, and since the first members of Christ’s Church were Jewish converts, this was a revolutionary idea that would have been difficult to communicate.
- God whispered that secret plan through the prophets Isaiah and Hosea, that while the promised Messiah’s initial role would be to reconcile the nation of Israel with God, He would also be a light unto the Gentiles.
- Therefore, the Universal Church, that invisible Body of Christ, includes all those who have received, or will receive Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord; people from every tongue, every tribe and every nation, people of every age and every generation.

The Greek word translated in our English Bibles as “church” is “ekklesia.” It was not a religious term, as it was first used to describe those who were called to assemble for a town meeting.

- However, in the Bible, the word is used to identify the gathered community of faith.
- In that sense, the “ekklesia,” began in Genesis 12, with God’s call to Abram and his family to be a light unto the Gentile nations, a role to which the New Testament refers as the church in the wilderness.
- So, from a covenantal theological viewpoint, the Church began with:
 - **The Patriarchs (Genesis):** God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob established the foundational lineage and God’s promise of blessing for all nations.
 - **The Nation of Israel (Exodus – Malachi):** The formal organization at Mount Sinai, where the Israelites became a covenant community centered around the Tabernacle and later the Temple.
 - **The New Covenant (Pentecost):** The inauguration of the Christian Church as described in the New Testament; the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant to include all people through Jesus Christ.

- This shows how the church evolved from a single family, to a nation, to a global community and will very soon become the Kingdom of God.

Today's church had its origin in the eternal purposes of God. Today's church is **the new covenant community of Jesus, rooted in Israel, but constructed by Jesus, and inaugurated by the Holy Spirit. The church is:**

- The people of God – The communion of saints – The adopted family of God – The body of Christ – The Bride of Christ – The temple of the Holy Spirit – The new humanity – The branches that abide in the true vine – The gathered covenant community – The kingdom of God on earth –
- Jesus built one church in 33 A.D – ***“I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”*** Matthew 16:18
- However, rather than following “the way,” men began to form religious groups according to their own liking.
- Today, there are more than 300 distinct historical denominations. But the total number of distinct churches and sects is over 45,000.
- The true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is not man's invention, nor the product of religious tradition.
- The true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is His Body, His Kingdom, His House, His Bride, because He promised it, He purchased it, and He is building it.

In his book, **“Ten Indictments Against the Modern Church,”** Paul Washer outlined the major issues plaguing today's church, all of which stem from a departure from the essential doctrines of the Christian faith as defined in the Apostle's Creed.

- **Denial of the Sufficiency of Scripture** – Liberal pastors cannot comprehend that an almighty God has encased His saving power in the verbal proclamation of His Word. Therefore, they are not only denying the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, but they are also denying its authority, sufficiency, and completeness.
- **Ignorance of God** – The entertainment-based worship services do not cultivate a holy reverence for a Holy God, which has led to the worship of a god created in man's image, rather than the God of the Bible, which is idolatry, and a violation of the first four of the ten commandments.
- **Failure to Address the Total Depravity of Man** – Out of fear of being called judgmental, most of today's pastors avoid dealing with the specific sins of man. Therefore, rather than calling them to confession and repentance to receive God's forgiveness, the pastors offer them psychological ways to overcome their sinful habits through self-help methods, which never work.

- **Ignorance of the Gospel and the need for Regeneration** – Even those who claim to have been born again do not fully understand the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to give a spiritually dead person a new heart. Regeneration is the beginning of our eternal salvation, for a dead man cannot even desire to be alive.
- **Ignorance of the Holy Spirit** – the lack of understanding of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, even among those who have been Christians for many years, is appalling, for the essential evidence of our salvation is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in and through our lives.
- **Unbiblical Gospel Invitations** – The carnal methods of “easy-believism,” such as manipulating people into raising their hands or repeating an unbiblical sinner’s prayer to be saved, have not only resulted in multitudes of people possessing false assurance of salvation, but has often inoculated them from the truth.
- **Ignorance Regarding the Nature of the Church** – Today’s church has forgotten its identity as the blood-bought bride of Christ. While every local congregation of believers should be a hospital for sinners, the Universal Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is the Fellowship of Saints, both living and dead; those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ.
- **Lack of Loving Church Discipline** – Congregations have abandoned the biblical mandate to hold believers accountable, thereby compromising the purity and testimony of the church.
- **Silence on Separation** – There is a lack of teaching regarding the necessity of holiness and the need for Christians to separate themselves from the ungodly values of the world, and today, that includes those churches that are proclaiming a false gospel.
- **Failure to Respect the Biblical Roles and Responsibilities Regarding Marriage and the Family** – Today’s churches have abandoned the Scriptures regarding the God-ordained roles for husbands and wives, and their responsibility to raise their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. The idea that parents are totally responsible for communicating the gospel to their children is way beyond their comprehension.
- **Today’s pastors are woefully inadequately trained to serve as the spiritual leaders of a congregation** – Even though they have unlimited access to Bible Colleges and Seminaries, to learn how to be an overseer of the Church, and shepherd the flock of God, they need to be discipled and mentored by an older pastor, such as the Apostle Paul did to Timothy.