

## HEALTHY CHURCH 1: THE PRIORITY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Church? Really?**

C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*...

#### **This term: Growing a healthy church**

1. The priority of the local church
2. Unity & diversity in Christ's body
3. Denomination & partnership
4. Encouraging and serving
5. Biblical manhood & womanhood
6. Bibleteaching and prayer
7. The Gospel
8. Reformed theology
9. Church government
10. Church membership
11. Discipleship & discipline
12. Corporate worship
13. Evangelism

#### **Deuteronomy 4:1-14**

#### **Article 19 (from the 39 Articles of Religion):**

The visible church of Christ is a congregation of believers in which the pure Word of God is preached and in which the sacraments are rightly administered according to Christ's command in all those matters that are necessary for proper administration.

#### **Heidelberg Catechism: Question 54**

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

A. I believe that the Son of God,  
out of the whole human race,  
from the beginning of the world to its end,  
gathers, defends, and preserves for himself,  
by his Spirit and Word,  
in the unity of the true faith,  
a church chosen to everlasting life.  
And I believe that I am and forever shall remain a living member of it.

## 1. WHAT IS "CHURCH"? IT IS THE GATHERING OF GOD'S PEOPLE

### (a) Church = assembly / gathering / congregation

Old Testament – Hebrew *qahal*

Old Testament – Greek (LXX) *ekklesia*

New Testament – Greek *ekklesia*

E.g. Deuteronomy 4:10, "assemble the people before me to hear my words."

E.g. 1 Corinthians 1:2, "To the church of God in Corinth...".

### Application:

The Church is most "churchly" when her members gather...

**So GATHER! (Hebrews 10:24-25)**

## 2. WHERE DOES THE CHURCH GATHER? IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH

### (a) God's church gathers in heaven

Hebrews 12:18-24, "For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest<sup>19</sup> and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.<sup>20</sup> For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear."<sup>22</sup> But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,<sup>23</sup> and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,<sup>24</sup> and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

= the church "universal"

**(b) God's church gathers on earth: the local congregation**

E.g. 1 Corinthians 1:2, "To the church of God in Corinth..."

Article 19: "The visible church of Christ is a *congregation* of believers."

**Application:**

**So join a local church... and give yourself to her people!**

**3. WHO GATHERS IN GOD'S CHURCH? ALL SORTS OF PEOPLE**

**(a) Diversity: gender, age, ethnicity**

Deuteronomy 31:12-13, "Assemble the people-- men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns-- so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. <sup>13</sup> Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess"."

Joshua 8:35, "There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them."

Joel 2:15-16, "Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. <sup>16</sup> Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber."

**Applications:**

**(i) A local church should not be monochrome**

**(ii) Gathered worship is for all God's people (see "Why encourage children to stay in church?")**

#### **4. WHY DOES GOD GATHER HIS CHURCH? TO DISPLAY HIS WISDOM**

Ephesians 3:10, "...so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."