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HCCL
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Anchors for the storm #7

Knowing The True Church

Anchors for the storm: Key truths that anchor us to Christ, help us navigate life and enable us to glorify the Lord.

Good morning! Welcome to Harvest! I greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Let's pray!

Gracious Father, Jesus, King of heaven and earth. Open your word to our hearts and minds. May the Holy Spirit be pleased to equip us with your truth and his power to live in ways that bring you glory and increase our joy in Christ our Lord. Amen!

Introduction:

There are at least 3 important questions I want you to ponder with me this morning:

- Why do we need the church?
- Why do I need to be part of the church?
- Can someone be a Christian without the church?

In the book “Evangelical Convictions” it describes the general attitudes of people regarding “the church” from within and without the church:

“...people who express some allegiance to Jesus view **the church** as simply an **optional extra**, a mere helpful tool, or perhaps even a detriment to spiritual life. In one poll, when asked, “Do you think that a person can be a good Christian if he or she doesn’t attend church?”, 88% of those who don’t attend church said yes, but so did 70% of those who do.¹” In another place this book notes, “During the time of the early church fathers it was held that ‘There is no salvation outside the church.’²”

The 2023-24 Religious Landscape Study (RLS)³ and other Pew Research Center polling find that the Christian share of the population, after years of decline, has been relatively stable since 2019. And the religiously unaffiliated population, after rising rapidly for decades, has leveled off – at least temporarily. At present:

¹ EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (pp. 193-194). (Function). Kindle Edition.

² EFCA. Evangelical Convictions, 2nd Edition (p. 193). (Function). Kindle Edition.

³ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/02/26/religious-landscape-study-executive-summary/#:~:text=The 2023-24 Religious Landscape,leveled off – at least temporarily.>

- **62% of U.S. adults describe themselves as Christians:** 40% are Protestant, 19% are Catholic, and 3% are other Christians.
- **29% are religiously unaffiliated:** 5% are atheist, 6% are agnostic, and 19% identify religiously as “nothing in particular.”
- **7% belong to religions other than Christianity:** 2% are Jewish, and 1% each are Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu (all figures are rounded).

So, if I have Jesus, if I am a spiritual person, if I describe myself as a “Christian” why do I need the church. Why do I need to be part of the church? Can’t I be a Christian without the church?

HCCL statement of faith regarding the church says,

7. The Church

We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.

1. Why do we need the church?

The first thing we need to understand is that technically becoming part of the church is not the driving force behind this issue. God is not calling people to a social gathering. The first thing that we need to be reminded of is that God is redeeming people's lives, saving them from their sin and giving them hope of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

To the man being crucified alongside Jesus, Jesus said according to **Luke 23:43** (ESV) 43 “... Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” And the apostle Paul said to the Philippian jailer, according to **Acts 16:30-32** (ESV) 30 Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” 31 And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.”

The True church is made up of people who “... have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head.”⁴

**We need the church because we were made to worship God
together as the body of Jesus!**

⁴ *We believe that the true church (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:4-6; 5:25; Heb.12:28) comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone (Ps. 103:12; Isa. 44:22; Jn. 3:16; Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:20-28; 4:3; 5:1, 21; 8:1, 30, 33-34; 10:4, 9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:9; Tit. 3:7; Heb. 10:14). They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-27), of which He is the Head (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16; Col. 1:18; 2:19).

Those who are truly born into Christ by the Holy Spirit want to gather together in his name for his praise, glory and exultation. It is what our hearts, once born again, were fully intended to do. It is here that David's words,

Psalms 34:8 (ESV)

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!

Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

Jesus said in **Luke 4:8 (ESV)** 8 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve." This was the heart beat of the early church, and the pattern of behavior of the church for generations to come: **Acts 2:42 (ESV)** 42 "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

And we are warned that not gathering together is spiritually unhealthy, we need one another!

Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV) "24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

2. Why do I need to be part of the church?

The short answer is that this is what you were built for! God designed you for worship as a part of his body of justified, sanctified and redeemed people. You are an important part of the body of Christ. Through faith in Jesus alone, you become a member of the body of Christ.

Romans 3:21-26 (ESV) 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Here is a idea that you may not have ever thought about! There is a "True Church" and there is "The Church". The "True Church" are those who are describe in Ps. 103:12; Isa. 44:22; Jn. 3:16; Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:20-28; 4:3; 5:1, 21; 8:1, 30, 33-34; 10:4, 9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:9; Tit. 3:7; Heb. 10:14. They are known by God, and give evidence of having been born again through loving Christ, serving Christ and pointing others to Christ. They live to make Jesus known to others and for their joy in Christ to increase daily. There are also some who are "The church," God knows these too, but we don't know for sure if they are part of the "True Church," because our knowledge of their heart's commitment to God is limited. They may claim to follow Jesus, but that is only their claim. However, we still treat them as part of the church, because only Jesus can sort them out without mistake.

Matthew 13:24-30 (ESV) 24 He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, 25 but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. 26 So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. 27 And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' 28 He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' 29 But he said, No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. 30 **Let both grow together until the harvest,**

and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."""

You are a valuable part of the Church - and every part of the body of Christ is needed and important.

The apostle Paul taught in **1 Corinthians 12:12-13** (ESV) "12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 **For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body**—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit."

3. Can someone be a Christian without the church?

It's technically possible to be a Christian without the church, but it's extremely difficult. Those who live this way, live a difficult Christian life...becoming like fruit that dries up while still attached to the vine.

- Those who come to worship as part of the gathered church, are giving themselves opportunity to be built up in their faith -

Ephesians 4:11-14 (ESV) 1 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

- Those who come to worship as part of the gathered church share their gifts with one another for the purpose of sharing loving service with one another.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (ESV) 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

- Those who come to worship as part of the gathered church share in the joy of worshipping God together!

As a local body of Christ we share in the experience of worship, through Communion at the Lord's Table, through Water Baptism as testimony of God's life changing work, through sharing joyful, Christ magnifying music in worship, Prayer in confession of sin, Assurance of pardon of our sin, and the tangible expressions of Christian love and grace.

Acts 9:31 (ESV) 31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

(See also Acts 20:28-30; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; Philem. 1-2),