

The Church and Her Love Part 1

Tyler Velin | Hebrews 10:19-25

February 21, 2021

We are taking a break from the book of Proverbs for the next two weeks for two reasons. The first is that we are in an odd place as a church. We are simultaneously everywhere and nowhere.

We have some of our stuff in the gym of our old building, we are gathering here in the library, and we are working to finish our new home in the Old Coke building.

On top of that we have a growing majority of people who are able to attend church in person, and yet a significant portion of people who for various reasons are still needing to join us digitally in the midst of a pandemic.

Yet in this odd time, while we are not the most ideal picture of a church we are certainly not less than a church.

But this tension can only be navigated well when we all share a biblical idea of what a church is, why it is important to the Christian and how it is called to conduct itself in our world today.

But secondly we have a congregational members meeting coming up in two weeks and we want to prepare our members, and those who might consider becoming members, to understand the responsibility we willingly take on as members of a church. At our members meeting we have the privilege and obligation of accepting new individuals into our midst and releasing others. We also get to exercise biblical congregationalism when it comes to financial decisions with the building fund, and we will have the unique opportunity at our next meeting to help a brother who has fallen into sin and is in need of help.

But before we look at what the church does, we must start with what the church is. In other words what is a church? How do we think about it? What makes it? And why is it important to the life of the Christian?

We are going to answer these questions over the next two weeks by spending some time in Hebrews chapter 10. The biblical word for church, *ekklesia*, simply means assembly. But the two words which make up that noun is the prefix “ek” which means out, and the root “kaleo” which means to call. The church is the assembly of the called out ones. Called to what?

Today we will see three things. First in Hebrews 10:19-22 we see **The Church is Called Together in the Gospel**, then in verse 23 we see **The Church is Called Together in Sound Doctrine** and then in verses 24-25 we see **The Church is Called Together for Love and Works**.

So the first thing we want to look at is why in the world Christians gather as local churches. This is going to be our first point today: **The Church is Called Together in the Gospel**.

What you believe about why the church exists shapes how you view the church. If you think the church exists because Christians like a good potluck or spiritual snuggle every now and then you will have a

wrong view of the church. If you think the church exists to grant you salvation or to boost your standing before God by your attendance record, you will have a wrong view of the church.

But what we are going to see in Hebrews 10 is that the church exists because the gospel creates a people who approach God together.

The book of Hebrews shows that the coming together of God's people is central to the story line of scripture. In fact the doctor turned pastor and theologian, D. Martin Lloyd Jones once said that if you say the function of the church has little to do with you for you are a "spiritually minded" person that the only thing he has to say to you is that you are a very unscriptural person.

Hebrews shows this by tracing the themes of the Old Testament and following them through the gospel in the New Testament. For most of the book he has been showing that even in the Old Testament temple there was still a problem which kept God's people from together worshipping him in his presence. The people's sins kept them from gathering together before God. Because God was holy and pure he would consume people who drew near to him who were sinful.

So God put up all these distancing measures. There were substitute sacrifices, animals which died instead of people for their sin. There were representative priests who acted before God on behalf of the people. And there was a tiered structure of the temple where the closer you got to God, the less people who were able to attend.

There was the outer court where gentiles could worship, the inner court where Jews could worship, then there was the first section of the temple where only the priests could go, and then in the center of the temple, divided from the rest of the space by a huge curtain was the Most Holy place, where God's presence dwelt. This place was so holy that only one high priest would be able to enter it one time a year.

The author of Hebrews describes all of this to show that even the temple structure didn't allow God's people to approach him fully. The sacrifices were a place holder, the priests themselves were in need of atonement, and even when the High Priest went that one time a year into the wonderful presence of God, the people still stood far off because of their own sin.

But look at how our passage opens today: **Hebrews 10:19-22**.

Here is the wonderful reality of the gospel. Jesus brings us into the Most Holy place, by opening his own body as a sacrifice for our sins.

There's a great irony that many of us are more introspective of ourselves when we meet a date for the first time than we stand before God for the first time.

We wonder, "Will she like me?" or in the context of a job interview, "Will they find me qualified?" But when we stand before God almighty and look at our sins we know that he will not like our sins, we know that we have been disqualified from his presence we have no assurance that we could ever stand before a God as good as this God.

But because of Jesus we get to enter that holy place with confidence. Why? Because we have come not through the curtain of our own works, but through the curtain of his own blood. The gospel is the good news that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore them to God.

If you have ever felt out of place, condemned, and unqualified to be loved by God, you really are. But the good news is that faith in Jesus Christ changes all of that.

It is Jesus blood which sprinkles clean your heart, which washes your dirty conscience, and which gives you a true heart to stand before the holy and righteous God with full assurance. That's how powerful the gospel is, that's how wonderful this high priest forever is in Jesus Christ.

And how do we approach the presence of God? Together.

Did you notice how corporate the call was? The author of Hebrews is showing that not only are you given access to God through Jesus, but God's people are able to draw near with you. There is a new place in which we encounter the presence of God. One day, one wonderful future day that place will be the New Heavens and the New Earth, but right now Jesus is the high priest over the new house of God.

What is this new house of God: **Hebrews 3:5-6**.

What is God's house? His people, people who gather together, people who in chapter 13 share local leaders together. For the time being, the church is where God dwells in a unique way.

There are lots of missionaries who go to the most beautiful places in the world where there is little to no Christian presence. When believers in those places of highest natural wonder want to experience God they do not turn to creation desiring to experience God's beauty in the height of the Himalayas or the pristine beaches of the South Pacific. They long for, and often give their life, to gaze at God together in the local church.

God chose to dwell in the midst of his people in the Old Testament at a distance, but through the work of Jesus Christ, God dwells with intimate nearness among his people. Look at how Peter put this in **1 Peter 2:4-5**.

Yes, it is true that God dwells through the Holy Spirit in the heart of all believers, but God has privileged the church, the local assembly as a unique place of communion.

There was a study done in 2014 which showed that groups of people who suffered painful experiences together share a unique sense of relational cohesion. It created what researchers called, "social glue."

For the church, the glue which holds us together is not age demographics, political beliefs, economic brackets or shared hobbies. The church is glued together by the shared trauma of our sin which is wiped away by the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. We are bound together by the good news of the gospel.

Look at what Paul says in **Ephesians 3:17-21**. Jesus loves the church, God is glorified in the church and the individual is better able to understand the love of God with all the saints in the church.

John Bunyan loved the church so much that he was jailed for it. He refused to believe that it was the state who had the authority to build the church and he believed that it was the gospel and the gospel alone which calls believers together. He wrote a theology of the church titled: "A Discourse of the Building and etcetera of the House of God." But this book was unique in that he loved the church so much that the only way he could express the divine realities and privileges of the church was to write his theology in poetic form. He couldn't help but sing when he thought of the gospel cherished in the church.

In one stanza of his poems he recognizes that many people might find the church to be silly, trivial, broken or insignificant, but at this point in history the gospel preaching church is the joy of the believer. He says this:

**What though some slight it, it a cottage call,
[Give it] the reproachful name of beggar's hall;
Yea, [though] to some it an eyesore is,
What though they count it base, and at it hiss,
Call it an alms-house, [built] for the poor;
Yet kings of old have begged at the door.**

The apostle Peter wrote to the church saying they have what the prophets ached for and that which angles long to see. If you could resurrect Abraham, or David or Solomon and ask them if they wanted to see the wonders of the modern world, or the discoveries of nature's glory, they would choose without delay to sit here with you and gaze at the privilege of God in the church.

The story of the Bible has always been the story of God redeeming a people for himself and the local church is right now how he has done that. The local church is where we together stand amazed at the gospel which saves us and the God who rules over us.

But what do we do together? This is where the author of Hebrews goes next: **The Church is Called together in Sound Doctrine.**

Look with me at **Hebrews 10:23**.

Here we see that as the church is formed by the gospel, the church is called to help each other hold fast to the truths of the gospel. This is actually part of the reason this specific church exists. Our church started in 1968 because the former denomination we were part of was no longer holding fast to the confession of hope.

They denied were denying the truthfulness of God's word, they were creating paths to salvation that were apart from the only way opened through Jesus Christ himself.

And the author of Hebrews here is saying that we have the responsibility to together, with the help of each other hold fast to what is true about the gospel. Remember what we already saw in **Hebrews 3:6**. Look at what Paul says in **Galatians 1:6-7**.

These passages might be jarring to us for a couple reasons. First is that our current culture fosters a sort of unity which is no unity at all. Our society holds up unity as the absence of disagreement. In other words as long as you do not disagree with me, we have unity.

But that's no barometer for unity at all. Unity is a set of shared agreement. Unity is not the absence of disagreement it is the convictional agreement on what is significant. For instance I have some neighbors who I have only casually interacted with. I can think of no disagreement I have discovered between us.

My wife and I on the other hand have many disagreements in life. Some small, some larger. And yet when a crisis hits in my heart I run to my wife. Why? Because we have real unity. We agree on the most significant things in life about who God made us to be, how he saves us and what he expects from us and that is true unity.

This biblical unity isn't that all Christians everywhere must have the same grammar of theology, but it does mean that all Christians everywhere need to have the same A, B, C's of doctrine.

Secondly, we might wrestle with passages like this because it actually demands that you yourself know doctrine! You need to know for certain things like if God is Triune or if we worship three gods. You need to know if Jesus was just an example for us to follow or if he was the sacrifice through which we have access to God.

D. Martin Lloyd-Jones finished his earlier by saying: **As a member of the body of Christ it is your business, your duty, to see to it that the Church visible in no way contradicts the doctrine of the Lord Himself, of which He has made us custodians and guardians.**

God has given us a responsibility to protect the truths of the gospel as the church. But what is behind this is not an arrogance which puffs up because Hebrews doesn't just say: hold fast the confession. Instead he says hold fast the confession of our hope.

We want to be a church where there are always new believers, and if you're a new believer such a calls to confession and doctrine might sound intimidating to you but this doctrine is the same hope in which you were saved.

If anyone is saved it is because they have a hope in Jesus. A hope that he really was the son of God who lived the perfect life you never could, but died in your place and that if you believe that you are delivered by his work. That's a confession. That's sound doctrine.

And as we grow to learn more and more about the God who saves us, the more profound our hope becomes.

I love the gentle correction of doctrine we see in **Acts 18:24-28**. When Priscilla and Aquila saw Apollos not fully understanding the gospel, they didn't arrogantly kick him out and strip him of his influence. Instead they gently took him aside and explained things more accurately to him.

We participate in this gentle instruction when we sit and listen to sermons. We experience this gentle correction when we participate in discipleship with each other. We participate in this gentle correction when we sing songs together. We participate in this gentle correction when we recite the Apostles Creed together.

In fact we watched something the other day which presented a view of the body and soul which is contrary to scripture. I asked my kids what happened to Jesus' body after he died, and my six year old

sat there for a second, and then put her hand on her heart like she was saying the pledge of allegiance and said: "He was crucified dead and buried he descended to the grave. On the third day he rose from the grave from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead."

No one can have perfect theology any more than anyone can perfectly know God, yet Christians strive to know the things of God, humbly for our own hope and for the hope of the lost.

We say that covenant membership at Sovereign Hope includes three things and the first is believing together. This is why we say this. We believe together on the essentials of the gospel not just so that we have it right, but so that we have hope.

We live in a country where believing what the Bible says about God and about us is becoming increasingly opposed. This is why we are given the gift of the church, so that as we see in verse 23 we might together encourage one another in the midst of opposition that he who promised is faithful. That the gospel which brought us together in the church will be the gospel that gets us into glory.

While the first commitment of membership at Sovereign Hope is to believe together, the following are that we belong together as a distinct community and that we become Christlike together in our community. We see both of these in the final point today: **The Church is Called Together for Love and Encouragement.**

Read with me: **Hebrews 10:24-25.**

Now I want to make it clear that I'm preaching this passage in the most ordinary sense of this passage. I know that our world is not ordinary right now and each of us are making decisions which seek to honor God, love others and obey our own consciences. So as I talk about this my sincere goal is not to shame anyone into any sort of action. Shame is not a great motivator when you're saved by grace.

But I do want to hold up what this passage says as universally true and that is that the church is about more than knowledge and more than attendance.

If the goal of the local church was about simply knowledge, then it would be a lot more effective and a lot safer to dedicate our time to writing good books and sending theology texts to dangerous countries instead of sending missionaries.

If the church were just about doctrine you could listen to a sermon while you're at the gym and suffer no loss. But the church is about a body gathered together, not neglecting to meet with each other.

But on the flip side, this is not merely attendance.

I knew of people who went to a Christian college and they had a chapel every week which was mandatory. So what they would do is show up to chapel, swipe their ID card reader at the door to show they attended and then leave.

I wonder how many of us manage to go to church with the same mentality. We showed up, we swiped our card, we've done our duty.

But the life of the church is about participating in the lives of others for the sake of love.

At Sovereign Hope when you become a member, you are actually agreeing to consider what it takes to help others follow Jesus.

Membership turns the gaze of the believer not only upwards towards God, but outwards towards others.

I have a confession. I used to show up to the Christian groups at the University of Montana for one reason: because I wanted to find a date. I would get there and immediately I would begin to survey the crowd and consider how I might stir up one for love.

But this passage holds up a far more loving goal inside the local church. If we are to apply this passage well when we come to church we begin to look around at who is here and we begin to consider to ourselves: "Who might I encourage today?" "Who might I be able to cause to feel more loved by Jesus and cared for by the church?"

And why do we do this? So that we might help each other love and pursue good works. Our community here is committed to belong to each other so that we might become more Christ-like together. It should be normal for you to be sitting at home and to consider the walk of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

You should consider how their devotions are, how their prayer life is, how their marriages are. Not because you want to shame them, but because you want to love them.

Why? Because the day is drawing nearer.

What is the day? The day is the day of Lord, the day when we might stand before God.

We help each other live out the Christian life because this world is hard, and life is short.

We need each other to do this well. Jesus did not call us into holy isolation but holy fellowship precisely because you need it.

The church is far more than what you do on Sunday morning the church is the community you get to be Christian with.

Hebrews shows really well that the temple in all of its beauty was a place holder for the house of God, the church. The place where people don't come and get sorted based off where they live and how much they make, but based off of the precious blood of Jesus which makes the many one.

Where we get to gather together to encourage one another, worship with one another, grieve with one another and care for one another as we behold the presence of God in our assembly.

But the church too is a place holder. At least the church in this context. One day all of God's church, those who have been saved by his blood will finally get a building big enough for all of us. We will finally not be caught up in silly debates or interpersonal issues, there will finally be no political tension of pandemic fatigue but we will be in his presence as his people for all eternity.

And it's because that is our wonderful future that we commit ourselves to this glorious present. The church is not perfect, but it's God's perfect plan for this stage in history.

So let us be made part of the many by the work of the gospel and give ourselves to the love of the church in the same way Christ has loved us.