

# *The Danger of Forgetting the Purpose of the Company of the Redeemed*

By Dr. Dallas Burdette  
Website: [freedominchrist.net](http://freedominchrist.net)  
Email: [dburdette22@charter.net](mailto:dburdette22@charter.net)

The *Ecclesia* [ἐκκλησία] of the New Testament, the fellowship of Christian believers, is precisely *not* that which every “church” is at least in part—an institution, a something. **The Body of Christ is nothing other than a fellowship of persons. It is “the fellowship of Jesus Christ” or “fellowship of the Holy Spirit,” where fellowship or *koinōnia* [κοινωνία] signifies a common participation, a togetherness, a community life.** The faithful are bound to each other through their common sharing in Christ and in the Holy Spirit,” but that which they have in common is precisely no “thing,” no “it,” but a “he,” Christ and His Holy Spirit. **It is just in this that resides the miraculous, the unique, the once-for-all nature of the Church: that as the Body of Christ it has nothing to do with an organization and has nothing of the character of the institutional about it.** This is precisely what it has in mind when it describes itself as the Body of Christ.<sup>1</sup> (Emphasis mine—bold)

The phrase “Danger of forgetting” the purpose of the Christian community should flash like neon lights in our lives. The principle of responsibility is demanded by God upon His family of believers. **We, as the people of God, exist, not just for our own sakes, but also for those who do not belong to God.** As believers in Jesus the Messiah, we are the channels of communication concerning God’s scheme of redemption for the salvation of lost humanity. It is **through the church** (God’s company of the Redeemed) that the Good News of salvation by grace “through faith” in Christ reaches out to others. Paul captures this true concept of the church in God’s scheme of redemption in his Epistle to the Ephesians (AD 60):

His intent was that now, **through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,**<sup>11</sup> according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ephesians 3:10-11)

Stephen Renn’s comments on the noun *ekklēsia* [ἐκκλησία] “church” should rekindle within us the significance of our English word *church*:

The noun *ekklēsia* occurs over one hundred times, meaning “church,” with the sense of a gathered community of God’s people assembled for worship. The word has only a few exceptional “secular” uses. General references to the “church” as **the new covenant community of believers** include Matt.

---

<sup>1</sup> Emil Brunner (1889-1966), *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, translated by Harold Knight, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 10-11.

18:17; Acts 2:47; 8:1ff.; 15:38; Rom. 16:1ff.; 1 Cor. 11:16ff.; 14:4ff.; 2 Cor. 8:18ff.; Eph. 3:10; Phil. 3:6; Col. 4:15ff.; Jas. 5:14. In particular, Acts 7:38 makes reference to the old covenant community of God's people as "the church in the wilderness." And Heb. 12:23 refers to "the assembly of the first-born, enrolled in heaven."<sup>2</sup> (Emphasis mine—bold)

Approximately four thousand years ago, God spoke to Abraham (2166-1991 BC) about the coming of the Messiah through whom all nations would be reconciled unto Himself. When God called Abraham, He informed him that it would be through his SEED (Jesus) that all nations of the earth would be blessed. Moses recorded the following words about the coming Messiah:

I will make you [Abraham] into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and **all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.** (Genesis 12:1-3)

Paul, in his Epistle to the Galatians (AD 49), calls attention to this promise to Abraham as he seeks to explain the nature of God's Gospel. Listen to him as he seeks to unravel the promise made by God to Abraham:

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to **his seed.** The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to **your seed,**'<sup>a</sup> meaning one person, who is Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

### **What Is the Purpose of the Church?**

Are we sharing Christ with others as foretold by God to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3)? We should never forget that it is through the "community of God" that this message of redemption continues to be proclaimed. We, so it seems, have forgotten the meaning and significance of the church in God's scheme of redemption. **What is the purpose of the church?** Apparently, many of us have forgotten that the **church is the instrument through which God reaches out to other people.** **The church is the depository of the treasure of God's Gospel for the human race.** When Paul received this Gospel from Jesus Christ, he understood that he was chosen to be an instrument through whom God might reach other men and women for Christ. Paul writes about this task of involvement to all people (AD 58):

**I am obligated** both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. <sup>15</sup> That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. (Romans 1:14-15)

---

<sup>2</sup> Stephen D. Renn, ed., "Assemble, Assembly," *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Word Studies for Key English Bible Words Based on the Hebrew and Greek Texts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 75–76. In spite of his wording that "people assembled for worship," we, as Christians, are the "church" whether assembled or not assembled. Worship is our way of life twenty-four hours a day. God never ordained a so-call worship service with certain rituals that have to be performed in a prescribe manner in order for worship to be acceptable to God (see Romans 12:1-3). Because we are the church, we assemble in order to strengthen or encourage one another to be faithful to the Lord.

<sup>a</sup> Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 24:7

**Do we feel obligated to “preach the gospel”?** Do we experience this same debt of gratitude that Paul experienced? Do we exhibit a spirit of thankfulness that entices us to spread the Good News about the Christ “event” upon Calvary for the forgiveness of sins? **We should remember that the church is not an institution. It is not an ecclesiastical organization.** It is the community of God for the purpose of propagating the Good News of salvation “in” and “through” Christ by faith. **Since this is so, the church stands for the manifestation of God to the lost.** To state this concept of proclamation of the message of salvation another way, the church stands for the reconciliation of the world to God “through” Christ. In other words, the church, through its members, shares the words of reconciliation. **Unfortunately, many Christians do not realize that every believer is a minister of reconciliation.** Peter expounds upon this truth in his First Epistle (AD 65/67). He explains the very heart of Christian ministry:

But **you are** a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, **that you may declare the praises of him** who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9)

### **Every Believer Is a Minister of Reconciliation**

What does this Scripture mean to us? How do we interpret these penetrating words of Peter? Are we conscious that every Christian is a priest? Do we remember that the church is “**a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation**” and “**a people belonging to God**”? Paul, too, speaks of this ministry of reconciliation to the Corinthians (AD 55/57). Paul paints a picture of the true role of every saint within the kingdom of God:

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if **anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation**; the old has gone, the new has come!<sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:<sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And **he has committed to us the message of reconciliation**.<sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.<sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin<sup>a</sup> for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. (2 Corinthians 5:16—6:1)

Paul and his co-workers were conscious that they were ministers of God’s reconciliation “in” and “through” Christ, but the same is still true today. Every Christian is a minister of reconciliation. The world finds God through His people. God has placed His message of reconciliation in human beings. What does “**God’s fellow workers**” mean to us? Do we sense that Paul is warning the believers in Corinth not to *abort* God’s grace? Is Paul admonishing against *terminating* God’s grace by refusing to live for God? Another question that arises from 6:1 is: Can one abandon God’s grace by the mistreatment of God’s people and the rejection of His church?

---

<sup>a</sup> Or *be a sin offering*

## What Does God's Grace Mean to Us?

What does God's grace mean to us? Do we want to throw-in-the-towel when things do not always go the way we want them to? Do we want to give up the church? Do we allow others to dampen our spirit? Do we permit others to stop us from serving God or attending the assembly for edification? It is not uncommon for many Christians to stop meeting with God's people when they get upset or angry with other believers. Many saints live in isolation from the Christian community. How do we apply the following words of Paul to our lives in Christ: "As God's fellow workers **we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain**" (6:1)? Are we testifying to the Gospel of God's grace? Do we imitate Paul's mission emphasis—God's grace? Paul told the Ephesian elders: "The Lord Jesus has given me—the **task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace**" (Acts 20:24)?

Have we forgotten our purpose? **There is a "danger of forgetting" our mission in Christ to testify about the Gospel of God's grace.** This threat is still real and present in our generation. My prayer is that God will enable us to remember that every believer is an ambassador for the Community of Christ. As Christians, we represent God's kingdom in an alien land. It is in this vein that Paul writes: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though **God were making his appeal through us**" (2 Corinthians 5:20a). As ambassadors (representatives) of God's kingdom, are we living up to our ambassadorial status? Is it an honor for us to represent the Creator in this world of sin and shame? As we reflect upon God's company of resurrected ones, what are we doing to make this redemptive body of believers a colony of heaven?

**Is our own private home an embassy of Jesus the Savior of the world?** Or is our home a place of turmoil? God wants reconciliation with every person. Yes, this means **you** as an individual; it means **us** collectively as the community of Christ. Even though God is the offended One, He still takes the initiative and wants all men and women to be saved. If we want to be right with Him, we can "in" and "through" Jesus. **God has provided "the Way" to Himself.** If we wish to become representatives of the message of grace, we must accept the Atonement of His only begotten Son. If we are willing to put ourselves into His covenanted mercies "through" Christ, we can rest assured of eternal life. Sooner or later, every spokesperson is relieved of his or her post. Why? Because God, ultimately, calls everyone home. **Have we forgotten the purpose of our call?** We are to declare His praises!

## CONCLUSION

### The Church: A New Radical Fellowship of Love

**We should never forget** that the *Ecclesia* of our Lord Jesus is none other than God's people, that is to say, the "elect" of God (Ephesians 1:3-14). **With the coming of Jesus**, we witness the Jewish sect being superseded by the universality of the new humanity in Jesus the Messiah (Ephesians 2:11-22; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21). **With the coming of Jesus**, the distinction between priests and laity ceased to exist. Within the Messianic kingdom, both men and women are now priest of God (1 Peter 2:4-10). **With the coming of Jesus**, we now live within the New

Covenant era as foretold by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34). In other words, the Old Covenant has vanished and the New Covenant is here (Hebrews 8:13; 12:22-29; Revelation 21:1-4).

What does the Church mean to us? **The Christian community is the new radical fellowship of love** (John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; 1 John 5:2-3; 2:7; 3:23; 4:21; and 2 John 6). **We should never forget** that our salvation is from the initiative of the sovereign love of God (John 3:16). Since God's righteousness is outside of us, He devised a way to bring us into fellowship with Himself. He could only accomplish this feat "through" and "in" Jesus (see Romans 3:21-30; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 14:6). We should never forget that the righteousness that we are clothed with is a "righteousness" that God **furnished, devised and made available** through faith (Romans 1:17). The Gospel sets forth a "righteousness **from** God" apart from works/law. **God's righteousness is outside of us.** We, as sinners, work FROM justification, NOT TO IT." As a result of His love, we are to love one another (see also 1 Corinthians 13). In conclusion, I draw attention to an excellent commentary on the initiative of God to redeem lost humanity by W. A. Visser't Hooft (1900-1984) and J. H. Oldham (1874-1969):

**There is no way of salvation which leads from man to God; no ascending scale of moral effort and religious practice [worship service with five ritualistic items] by which man [men and women] can restore the lost personal fellowship with God.** The incarnation of the Son of God led to the Cross, and it is in this fact that the fundamental character of the world is disclosed. **The world is contrary to God and to His anointed** [Jesus the Christ]. The Church, as the bearer of the Gospel of God's forgiveness, and as the **home of the new fellowship of love** which God Himself creates, stands in sharp contrast over against the world. (Emphasis mine—bold)<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> W. A. Visser't Hooft and J. H. Oldham, *The Church and Its function in Society* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, Second Edition, 1938), 134.