

Healthy Members pt1 - Ephesians 1-3

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Date: 17 March 2019

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[0 : 00] Father, you have given to us wonderful gifts. You have given to us the gift of your word, inspired by you, written down, so that we can read it and hear your voice to us today.

And thank you that you have given to us also the gift of your Holy Spirit to open up our minds, that we may understand not just intellectually, but we may understand spiritually the things that you are teaching us and showing us.

And we ask for his help, that we may understand what it is to be your people. And we ask, Father, that through our study this morning, we would be encouraged, and we would be built up together, and that we would live well as your people in this world.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So what comes to mind when you hear the word church?

Perhaps a worship service you attend on a Sunday morning. Maybe it's an old building with beautiful architecture and stained glass windows.

[1 : 30] Maybe you see church as an outdated institution that's no longer relevant. Or perhaps church stirs up emotions of fear and hate, memories of abuse and hurt.

It's important then for us when we think about church to understand what we mean by church. Well, in the Bible, the word simply means a gathering of God's people.

In fact, the whole story of the Bible is God's plan and God's promise to create a people for himself, a people who are gathered around the Lord Jesus.

So at the very beginning of our Bibles, in Exodus 6 verse 7, it says this. I think it's all on your notes there. I will take you as my own people and I will be your God.

So God's promise to his people Israel to gather them to himself, to rescue them, and they would be his people. And then at the very end of the Bible, in Revelation chapter 21, we get the fulfillment of that promise and that plan.

[2 : 48] where it says, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

So God's plan from before the creation of the world is to create a people for himself and he is fulfilling that throughout history. And one day, that will come to its ultimate fulfillment as we are gathered around the Lord Jesus in the new heavens and the new earth.

So first, when we come to think about church, we need to see it as a who, not a what. Church is not a building. This is not church.

This is the community center. The church may be in this building, but it's not the building itself. It's not a service or it's not an institution.

It is a people who are saved by God and are belonging to God. So look, for example, how Paul writes his letter to the church in Ephesus chapter 1, verse 1.

[4 : 02] Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful, that is those who have faith in Christ Jesus.

And then at the end of the letter, the very last couple of verses, chapter 6, verse 23 and 24, he says, Peace to the brothers and sisters.

And love with faith from God, the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

So the church is a people, brothers and sisters, united together in their faith in Christ and their love for Christ. They are God's holy people who have been called out from the world to himself.

So when we think about church, we think who, not a what. Second, when we think of church, we need to see it as both a local gathering and a heavenly gathering.

[5 : 15] So again, go back to chapter 1, verse 1. So we're thinking of church as a who, it's a people, but it's also a local gathering and a heavenly gathering.

So verse 1, he says, to God's holy people in Ephesus. It's a local gathering of God's people in the city of Ephesus.

And that's how Paul writes many of his letters. So he writes to the church of God in Corinth. Or to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi.

To God's holy people in Colossae. So the church is a local gathering of believers in Christ. And this is what this gathering is here.

It's a local gathering of believers in Christ, in Carigalline. But it's much more than just a local gathering of believers.

[6:18] Ralph referred to this earlier on, just before we sang. So chapter 2, verse 6. So the believers are a local gathering, but also, chapter 2, verse 6, And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

So where is the church now? Well, it's a local gathering, but in verse 6, chapter 2, verse 6, it's also saying that we are already seated with Christ in the heavenly realms.

Now, we don't fully experience that yet in all its fullness, but from God's perspective, as he looks at the church now, we are already part of the eternal heavenly gathering.

You see, the church is not just this temporary thing we do until we get to heaven and then we dump church and put it to one side. No, heaven is church in all its fullness.

It's a continuation. We don't stop being the church when Christ comes again. We continue as the church for all eternity.

[7:42] You see, the local church, this gathering of believers here in this location, is a visible manifestation. It's a picture of the eternal heavenly gathering that is to come.

John Stott, a well-respected writer and pastor, put it like this. You have it on your notes. Follow along with me.

He explains it like this. He says, The church lies at the very centre of the eternal purpose of God. It is not a divine afterthought.

It's not an accident in history. On the contrary, the church is God's new community. For his purpose, conceived in past eternity, being worked out in history, and to be perfected in a future eternity, is not just to save isolated individuals and so perpetuate our loneliness, but rather to build his church.

That is, to call out of the world a people for his own glory. So the church isn't just this made-up idea. It is God's plan and purpose from before time began, which will reach its fulfilment when all God's people from all lots of local churches from around the world will be gathered together with him.

[9:13] God's church is at the very centre of his plan and promise for the world. So let's unpack this a little bit more under two headings.

First, defining who the church is. Defining who the church is. We've seen that the church is a who. It's a people. It's also a local gathering, which is a visible expression of our eternal heavenly gathering. But who is the church?

Is everybody here in this room or in this building part of the church? Can anyone be part of the church?

I mean, how do you become part of the church? Well, hopefully, the Bible gives us a great image for the church, the head and the body.

[10:11] So have a look at chapter 1, verse 21. Ephesians chapter 1, verse 21. So here, Paul has been talking about how God had raised Christ from the dead.

And he tells us Christ was raised, verse 21, far and above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under Christ's feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.

So Christ is the head. Christ is the ruler of the church. He has absolute power and supreme authority over all people and over all things, over everything in this universe.

He is over it all for the good of the church. I don't own the church. I may be pastor of this local church, but I don't own it.

[11:20] We don't own the church. The church belongs to Christ. He is the head. He is the supreme one over all things. Now read on.

The church, verse 23, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. So the church, Christ is the head.

The church is the body. We're under the head. We submit to the head. But more than that, the head is our source of life. That's what I think is meant by that little phrase, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Not only is the church an expression of Christ, the body of Christ, but all of Christ is in his people. So he is the source of true life.

And without the head, there is no life. So if Christ is the head and the church, the people, are the body, well, we're still back to the same question.

[12:28] Who is part of the body? Who gets to make up the body of Christ? Well, two things. First, the body are sinners who are saved by grace.

The body are sinners saved by grace. So chapter 2, verse 1. As for you, he's talking to the local church, as for you, you are dead in your transgressions and sins.

Now that leaves us in a dangerous position. To be dead in our sin is not a good place to be. It's not just living as we please. It puts us in danger.

We see that at the end of verse 3. Because of our sin, end of verse 3, like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

Because of our rebellion, because of our turning against God, we're under his just judgment. And that's a dangerous place to be because to stand before God's judgment means to be separated from him for all eternity, not as the gathered people of God in the new heavens and the new earth, but separated from the people of God and from God himself in hell.

[13:56] But thankfully, God kept his promise to gather a people to himself. So, verse 4, but because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

It is by grace you have been saved. God has intervened into our lives by his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has saved, he has rescued his people by taking upon himself the judgment they deserve, the wrath of God has fallen on Christ and in its place they are given new life with Christ.

And that gift of salvation is for all those who will trust in him. So, if today you are here and your faith is in Jesus Christ, you are saved.

It's by grace. It's not because of something you've done. It's not because of your background or your heritage or your family who you belong to. It's by God's gracious gift.

You are no longer dead. You are no longer under God's wrath and judgment but you are now living under your new head, your new ruler, Jesus Christ.

[15:17] Verse 6, And God has raised us with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. So, those who are in the body, those who are part of the body of Christ are sinners who have been saved by grace and are now, as it were, gathered with the Lord Jesus in the heavenly realms.

But not only are those saved by grace, they are now members of one body. So, have a look at chapter 3, verse 6.

Those who are saved by grace become members of the one body. Chapter 3, verse 6. This mystery, so the mystery he's been talking about is not something that's secret, it has now been revealed by God, his plan and promise to make a people for himself.

That's the mystery that has been revealed. So, he tells us, this mystery, is that through the gospel, the Gentiles, Gentiles are people who are not Jews, are heirs together with Israel.

Members together of one body and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. So, through the gospel, through the good news of Jesus Christ, as that good news spread to all different peoples from all different backgrounds, they were achieving God's plan and promise which was to bring a people together for himself.

[16:58] They would become members of one body, the body of Christ. So, no matter what your race is, no matter what your culture, or what your background, it doesn't matter whether you are Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, whether you are male or female, through faith in Christ, we become members of the body of Christ.

Or as it has at the end of verse 6, we are sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. We are incorporated together as God's people.

So, the body are sinners saved by grace who become members of that one body. And if we are members of the body of Christ, that is expressed in two ways.

It's expressed through baptism and the Lord's Supper. So, let's take each one in turn. First, baptism. You can turn to this if you like, but I think it's on your notes.

In Acts 19, Luke, the author, gives an account of when Paul first went to Ephesus. So, before there was a church, before there was a gathering of God's people, Paul went there, others had been there, they'd been teaching and sharing the good news of Christ.

[18 : 23] And as Paul went there, they had been talking about John the Baptist. And they talked about the baptism of John the Baptist. And Paul responds to their discussions and he says this in Acts 19, verses 4 and 5.

He told, Paul told the people to believe in the one coming after him. that is the one coming after John the Baptist, that is in Jesus.

And as they heard about Jesus on hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. They heard the gospel, they believed the gospel, and in response, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So they effectively, when we are baptized, when they were baptized, they were saying, yes, on the one hand, I believe in Christ, I believe in Jesus, but yet I also belong to his family, to the body of Jesus, to Christ's family.

So when we're being baptized, it is both a commitment to Christ to say, yes, I believe in Christ, but it is also a commitment to the church saying, yes, I am now part of God's family.

[19 : 46] And second, the Lord's Supper. I think we need to go to 1 Corinthians chapter 11 for this.

When we think about church, it's not that there's one particular letter or one particular passage in the Bible which says this is what church is all about. it's taught throughout in many different ways.

So let's go to 1 Corinthians chapter 11. It's back a few pages. 1 Corinthians chapter 11.

So in this section chapter 11, the second half of it is all about the Lord's Supper. chapter 11, but there's been a problem in the church.

So chapter 11, verse 18. And he's responding, Paul's responding to the problem in the church. He says, in the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, now isn't that significant?

[20 : 54] He's writing to a church and he's saying, look, as you come together, as you meet together as God's people, there are divisions among you. And to some extent, I believe it.

You see, the Lord's Supper was to be a meal to remember Christ's death, which was also an expression of their unity in Christ. But that's not how they were celebrating it.

Look at verse 20. He says, so then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat. For when you're eating, some of you go ahead with your own private supper.

So, you can imagine this church gathering, there's people who are very rich and wealthy and they've got their own homes and things are going well for them and then there's people who aren't so well off and it seems they've kind of divided themselves and the wealthy ones are all off together having a great time and they're forgetting those who don't have anything.

So, as a result, one person remains hungry and another one gets drunk, don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing?

[22 : 11] What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter. Verse 29, for those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

So, it was a serious matter when they came to celebrate the Lord's Supper. They needed to remember that not only were they remembering that Christ died for them as a people, but it was also a meal where they came together in unity to express the fact that they were one body, that Christ had brought them together from all kinds of different backgrounds to be one people.

So, as they ate the Lord's Supper, as they ate the bread and drank the wine together, it was an affirmation of their ongoing faith in Christ. Yes, in our baptism, it was a once-off, I believe in Jesus, and as they shared in the communion or in the Lord's Supper together, they were saying, yes, I continue on in my faith in Christ.

But not just that, I continue on in my commitment to the church body, to the church family. So, we could put it this way, baptism is a celebration of a family birth.

When somebody is baptized, it is like a new birth. Someone is being added to God's family because they've trusted in Christ. And the Lord's Supper is like a family meal.

[23 : 52] family. It's where the family gather together to renew and to remind themselves of being one body together, trusting in Christ.

Now, before we move on, I'd like us to think about this a little bit more for our own lives. You can answer these for yourself. And the first one is this, are you in the body of Christ? Very simply, are you a Christian? are you trusting in Jesus? The invitation from Ephesians, you can go back to Ephesians, is very clear that Christ has done all the work for you. He's died your death for you. He's lived the perfect life for you. So trust him. Know his forgiveness. Know his acceptance so that you can be part of the body of Christ. Christ. So are you a Christian? Are you in the body of Christ? You need to answer that question today for yourself. If you are in the body of Christ and you say, yes, I am a Christian, let me ask you, have you been baptized?

[25 : 12] Do you take the Lord's Supper? Supper? If not, why not? Or maybe you're a Christian, you say, well, I've been baptized, but I don't take the Lord's Supper, or, yes, I'm a Christian, I take the Lord's Supper, but I'm not baptized.

Both are commands from the Lord to make it visible and clear that, yes, I believe in Christ, and yes, I belong to his church family. The two go together.

They shouldn't be separated. So let me ask you, if you are in the body of Christ, have you been baptized, and do you share in the Lord's Supper?

And if you don't, why not? So, summary so far, under defining who the church is.

The church are those who are in the body of Christ through faith, which is expressed in baptism and the Lord's Supper.

[26 : 19] Very simple. The church, the true church, are those who are in the body of Christ through their faith in Christ, and that faith in Christ is expressed in baptism, which is once-off, and the Lord's Supper, which continues until Christ comes again.

So, that's defining who the church is. Second, identifying who the church is. So, they're parallel, they're similar, but I hope as we go along we'll see that there's a difference.

We define who the church is, and now we want to identify who the church is. It's important to understand that we don't separate being a Christian from being in the church.

So, if you are in Christ, you are in the church. Look at the three images or pictures that were given in Ephesians chapter 2.

Let's have a look at verse 15. Ephesians chapter 2 verse 15. The middle of verse 15. So, it's going back to God's plan and God's promise.

[27 : 34] Ephesians 2 verse 15. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two.

So, from the Jews, from the Gentiles, to creating himself out of all these people one new humanity, thus making peace.

And in one body, so through the body of Jesus Christ, to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

So, Christ has come through his death on the cross and by his resurrection to bring a people together for himself, a new community, a new people under him.

Verse 19. consequently, so he's saying, look, in light of what Christ has done, this is who you are. Because Christ has died for you, because he's brought you together, this is who you are.

[28 : 39] And he gives us three brilliant pictures to describe who the members of the body are. First, he says, you are citizens with God's people.

Verse 19, consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people. You see, when you're born in a country, you become a citizen of that country.

It's an automatic right. You're born in Ireland, well, you're Irish. You receive all the privileges and responsibilities of being a citizen. In the same way, Christ's death for us makes us citizens of God's nation.

We become citizens with the already citizens that God has made. We are God's people together. Not only citizens with God's people, another picture he gives, he says, we're like children of God's family.

So look at the end of verse 19. We are also members of his household. So again, when a child is born into a family, they get to be treated as part of the family.

[29 : 58] They don't become a brother and sister to their siblings by their very birth into the family. They are already a brother and sister with their siblings. It's something the child receives and enjoys at birth.

Well, through our faith in Christ, we become children. we become part of his family. It's an automatic privilege.

And then the third picture, verse 22, he describes church as being a dwelling for God's presence. So verse 22, and in him, in Christ, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit.

So just as a builder goes out and he takes his blocks and he puts them one on top of the other to build a house, so Christ takes us as individuals and builds us together.

We're incorporated together. We're a living structure where God dwells by his spirit. Now, these are all images and pictures of the local church.

[31 : 16] In each picture, the individuals make up the whole. Citizens make up the nation. Children make up the family. People like stones make up the building.

And they're also related to each other. There is a union, a relationship, an interdependence. You see, the Bible never ever speaks of Christians in isolation.

If you are a Christian, Christian, you don't get to decide whether or not you become part of the church. It's not something you think, well, I'm a Christian, and go, I wonder if I'll become part of the church.

If you are a Christian, the question is not will I become a member of the church, but how am I going to live out my membership?

Here's a quote, and I think it's on your page from Timison Chester. They say, by becoming a Christian, I belong to God and I belong to my brothers and sisters.

[32 : 25] It is not that I belong to God and then make a decision to join a local church. My being in Christ means being in Christ with those who are in Christ.

Christ. And that's how Paul treats these believers here, as he writes. He speaks to the church, the body of believers. He's not writing to individuals, but to a family, a nation, a building, people who are one.

So we look to that one example in chapter 3, verse 6. He says, you are members together of one body. Look at chapter 4, verse 16. From him, from Christ, the whole body is joined and held together by every supporting ligament and it grows and it builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

Or chapter 4, verse 25. Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body.

You see, we can't live in isolation. It never, ever speaks of a Christian being on their own, ever. So, we are members of one body.

[33 : 46] Second, identifying through membership. Now, all of this is good, what we've looked at so far. It helps us see that we not only belong to Christ, but we but we also belong to the church.

But how do we identify who is in the local church? We've already identified at one level or defined it as those who believe in Christ and trust Christ, which has been expressed through baptism and the Lord's Supper.

But how do we identify who is in the local church? How do we know who belongs to Carigoline Baptist Church? It would be an interesting thing to ask, and I'm not going to ask you to do it, but for people to put up their hands and say, do you belong to Carigoline Baptist Church?

Who of you would put up your hand? I'm not asking you to do that, just putting it out there. Is it whoever turns up on a given Sunday?

So what about somebody who comes just once a month or somebody who appears twice a year? Does that make you part of Carigoline Baptist Church? How do you define it?

[34 : 59] How do you identify who the people are? Do we just have to kind of have this magical kind of, oh, and we all know who it is?

Well, church membership is the formal way of identifying who belongs to a local church.

But you say, ah, Johnny, you haven't read your Bible very well. Because membership isn't in the Bible, is it? I've read my Bible, I've read through Ephesians, and membership in this formal sense is not there.

Well, let me ask you, is the word Trinity in your Bible? Anybody ever come across the word Trinity? It's not there. But the teaching of Trinity is.

God is one in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It's a word that teaches us and tells us what and who God is.

[36 : 00] Now, the word membership in this formal way might be in your Bible, but the teaching and the practice is. It's all over the place. Let me give you one example.

In fact, it's assumed in the book of Ephesians, as we've been reading, it's addressed to a particular people in a particular place. But I want to go and show you this a little bit more.

Go to Acts chapter 20. Acts chapter 20. So if you wanted further background on Ephesians, you could read chapters 19 and 20.

So at this point, the church has already been established. Paul had visited it a number of times. And now he's traveling back from a visit from modern-day Greece, and he's kind of coming back down sort of around the Mediterranean, down along the coast of modern-day Turkey, and he's heading towards Jerusalem.

And on the way, he stops at this little place called Miletus, which is just south of Ephesus on the coast. So chapter 20, verse 16.

[37 : 22] Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.

From Miletus, so he stopped there for a little while, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. So it's like a meeting he'd arranged. He sent a message saying, guys, come over down to Miletus, I want to have a chat with you.

And listen to what he says to the elders of the church. Verse 28. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you who will not spare the flock. The savage wolves, of course, were false teachers.

Verse 30. Even from your own number, from your own number, men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

[38 : 32] So be on your guard. Now, that simple reading implies three things that I want us to think through carefully.

First, there is clearly an identifiable church with elders. A clearly identifiable church with elders. He sends a message for the elders in the church at Ephesus. In other words, it's a defined local church of believers.

And even when he goes on to warn them, he says, look, there may be people who come from within your own number. A defined group of people he's talking about again.

So there were those who were definitely in the church at Ephesus and they were able to define and know who they were and identify who they were. And there were those who were not in the church at Ephesus.

[39 : 36] So first, there was a clearly identifiable church with elders. Second, the church knows who the elders are.

So as we read through 28 and 29, the elders are given the responsibility for shepherding, for caring, for protecting the flock. the church, yes, are God's people.

He died for them. He bought them with his own blood. Nevertheless, the elders are given responsibility for the church. The elders are not a secret society that nobody knows who they are. The church all knows who the elders are. They've been affirmed and appointed by the church and we can read that through Titus. So if you have a look at Titus chapter 1, that when people went, they appointed elders for every church.

So practically, yes, we have elders in this church. If you don't know who they are, they're Alex, Jonathan, Ralph, and myself. But how were the elders appointed in this church?

[40 : 50] Is it whoever happens to be here on a Sunday gets to decide and say, yep, we'll have them as elder? No, the elders are appointed and affirmed by the members of the church.

It wouldn't be good, for example, if 20 people, let's just say, and why not think this, like 30 people decide to come in next Sunday and they're here for a couple of weeks and they decide, well, we'll have them, they'll be elder.

And then they leave and we never see them again. I mean, is that how it works? No, it doesn't. The church knows who the elders are because they have been affirmed by the church themselves.

And then third, the elders know who the church are. God has made the elders shepherds over the flock. That doesn't mean that every single Christian in the whole region of Turkey, Ephesus was in Turkey, does that mean the elders were over all the Christians in that place?

No, the flock are a defined number of people. They are shepherds of the flock, look at verse 28, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

[42 : 06] There are specific people, specific sheep that the shepherds are to look after, to care for. It's specific. So let's ask another question.

How do the elders of Caragalline Baptist Church know who the flock are? How do I know who I am meant to pastor? Are they all the people who ever come in?

Or people who regularly come? Or all the Christians that there might be around Caragalline? Who's responsible? Well, they need to be identified.

And membership is the way of doing that. So membership is not just this mad idea that we've come up with. It's a teaching and a practice of the local church which is set out in the New Testament.

And we believe that membership is best and right. It's good for the church. We don't and we can't force people to become members. Yet we see it as the best way of identifying who the church is so they are incorporated together and, well, hold elders accountable and the elders know who they are caring for.

[43 : 32] So if you're here this morning and you consider this to be your local church and you would put up your hand and say, yes, Caragalline Baptist Church is the church that I belong to. Well, let me encourage you.

Why don't you speak to one of the elders and let's together identify who the church is? Now, you might want to come back to me and talk to me about some of these things.

But I want us to think through carefully what God's word is saying. So in summary, we've defined who the church is.

We've identified the church is. The church is not a what but a who. They're people. People like you and me.

A local gathering of God's people which is a visible expression or a visible demonstration of the eternal heavenly gathering. The church are those who are in the body of Christ.

[44 : 36] Sinners saved by grace through faith which has been expressed through baptism and the Lord's Supper and identified through church membership.

The church is no small matter. It is at the very center, the very heart of God's plan and promise for the world.

He is gathering a people to himself to display his glory and a church that will go out and invite and call others so that they too may be part of the body of Christ.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you