

## **BELONG (1)**

### **People called by God**

#### **A. Introduction**

1. What is the church?

The answer is: It depends.

There are lots of ways of answering this question.

The church is...

2. A gathering.

The word "church" means "assembly" or "gathering".

A church refers to a gathering in general, and specifically to a particular gathering of Christians who meet together to worship God.

3. The people of God.

*"The church is the people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and have been incorporated into his body through baptism with the Holy Spirit." (Gregg Allison)*

*"The church is the body of people called by God's grace through faith in Christ to glorify him together by serving him in his world." (Mark Dever)*

*"A community elected for eternal life and united by faith, who love, follow, learn from, and worship God together." (New City Catechism Q48)*

4. Visible and invisible.

*"The catholic or universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that fills all in all." (1689 BCF 26.1)*

*"All persons throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel, and obedience unto God by Christ according unto it, not destroying their own profession by any errors everting the foundation, or unholiness of conversation, are and may be called visible saints; and of such ought all particular congregations to be constituted." (1689 BCF 26.2)*

5. A creature of the Word

The church was created (hence it is a creature), but it was not created by humans.

The church was created by God through the gospel and is kept alive by His Word.

6. The gospel made visible

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35)

*"The doctrine of the church is important because it is tied to the good news itself. The church is to be the appearance of the gospel. It is what the gospel looks like when played out in people's lives. Take away the church and you take away the visible manifestation of the gospel in the world." (Mark Dever)*

7. One, holy, catholic and apostolic.

*"We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church." (Nicene Creed)*

The church is one because God is one.

The church is holy because God is holy.

The church is catholic (universal across space and time) because God is Lord of all the earth and King of the ages.

The church is apostolic because it is founded on and faithful to what the apostles taught.

#### 8. Where the Word is preached, and baptism and the Lord's Supper is celebrated.

*"Wherever we see the Word of God rightly preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists." (John Calvin)*

The church is created and preserved by these two marks.

#### 9. The Dearest Place on Earth.

*"Give yourself to the Church. You that are members of the Church have not found it perfect and I hope that you feel almost glad that you have not. If I had never joined a Church till I had found one that was perfect, I would never have joined one at all! And the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect Church after I had become a member of it. Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us." (Charles Spurgeon)*

Why is it so great to be part of the church?

*"Our greatest need is to recapture the New Testament teaching concerning the Church. If only we could see ourselves in terms of it, we would realise that we are the most privileged people on earth, that there is nothing to be compared with being a Christian and a member of the mystical body of Christ." (Martyn Lloyd-Jones)*

#### 10. It is a place to belong.<sup>1</sup>

By looking at the names given to or the image used to describe the church, we will see why the church is a great place to belong to.

This doesn't mean that the church is perfect or that our experience of belonging to a church will be perfect.

The apostle Paul knew how disappointing a local church can be, and yet he still wrote about what a privilege and joy it is to belong to it.

#### 11. People CALLED by God.

The church is the people who have been called by God.

*"including you who are also called by Jesus Christ." (Romans 1:6)*

*"To all who are in Rome, loved by God, called as saints." (Romans 1:7)*

*"We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)*

*"And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified." (Romans 8:30)*

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<sup>1</sup> A Place to Belong is the title of a book by Megan Hill on which this series is based

"To the church of God at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called as saints." (1 Corinthians 1:2)

"God is faithful; you were called by him into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:9)

"There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling." (Ephesians 4:4)

"And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful." (Colossians 3:5)

"He has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began." (2 Timothy 1:9)

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." (1 Peter 2:9)

*"All those God has chosen in eternity are called particularly by God, and this call is effectual in its power and outcome. Through the call of God, a sinner's heart is regenerated and her will is liberated; because of this, the effectual call logically precedes conversion, the exercising of faith in Christ. All those who are called in this way will be justified and, ultimately, glorified, and all of the glory goes to God who works this change in us by his call." (Matthew Barrett)*

## **B. What we were when God called us**

### 1. When God called us, we were dead.

We were dead because of our transgressions and sins.

"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins." (Ephesians 2:1)

"Indeed, I was guilty when I was born; I was sinful when my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51:5)

"We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the LORD has punished him for the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)

We were dead because we were separated from God who is the source of life.

"as it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one." (Romans 3:10-12)

"Once you were alienated and hostile in your minds as expressed in your evil actions." (Colossians 1:21)

### 2. When God called us, we were disobedient.

We showed this by the way we lived our lives.

"...in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient." (Ephesians 2:2)

"When the LORD saw that human wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every inclination of the human mind was nothing but evil all the time." (Genesis 6:5)

We followed the way of this world, the devil, and the flesh.

### 3. When God called us, we were damned.

We were facing God's wrath.

"We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also."  
(Ephesians 2:3)

"The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him." (John 3:36)

We were without hope and without God.

"At that time you were without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world." (Ephesians 2:12)

4. All of us were dead, disobedient, and damned when God called us.

### **C. What we are because God called us**

1. Because God has called us, we are free from the penalty of sin.

Our sin has been forgiven and we have been made righteous in God's sight, because Jesus has taken the punishment we deserve in our place and God has accepted His righteousness as our own.

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!" (Ephesians 2:4-5)

"He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

*"Talk of the punishment of a believer! There is not such a thing." (Charles Spurgeon)*

2. Because God has called us, we are free from the power of sin.

No longer are we slaves to sin.

"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires. And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness."  
(Romans 6:12-13)

"But thank God that, although you used to be slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart that pattern of teaching to which you were handed over, and having been set free from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness." (Romans 6:17-18)

We are able with the help of the Holy Spirit to live lives that please the Lord.

3. All of us are alive and freed because God called us.

### **D. What we will be because God called us**

1. Because God has called us, one day we will be like Jesus.

"Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is." (1 John 3:2)

"Now to him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory, without blemish and with great joy." (Jude 24)

*"I am not what I ought to be — ah, how imperfect and deficient! I am not what I wish to be — I abhor what is evil, and I would cleave to what is good! I am not what I hope to be — soon, soon shall I put off mortality, and with mortality all sin and imperfection. Yet, though I am not what I ought to*

*be, nor what I wish to be, nor what I hope to be, I can truly say, I am not what I once was; a slave to sin and Satan; and I can heartily join with the apostle, and acknowledge, "By the grace of God I am what I am." (John Newton)*

2. Because God has called us, one day we will take our place around the throne of God giving praise to Him and to the Lamb.

"They said with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing! I heard every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them say, Blessing and honour and glory and power be to the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever! The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped." (Revelation 5:12-14)

"After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10)

3. The church is a great place to belong, because we belong to the people who God has called.

We share the same testimony that we were sinners, but God has shown us grace by saving us.