

The Calling of the Church

Ephesians 1: 3-14

Church Back in 2010 I received an envelope in the mail from our local courthouse. Inside was a letter stating I was being summoned to appear at the courthouse on a specific date for a specific purpose – to serve as a member of the jury of fellow citizens who would decide the guilt or innocence of an individual who was accused of a crime. The word summon is defined as “an authoritatively or urgently call on (someone) to be present, especially as a defendant or witness in a law court.”

Today, as we continue to series on “The Pattern of the Church,” we are going to recognize an important truth that clearly defines what a church is and in doing so we are instructed on how we should behave.

The word church is a translation of a Greek word, Ekklesia, which means “a called-out assembly or congregation.” The term comes from a Greek verb “kaleo”, which means “to call.” When you think of “the church” that is exactly what you should think of. According to Scripture, we are “the called – the summoned.”

In Romans 8:28 there is a wonderful definition of the assembly of believers as, “the called according to his purpose.” We meet in a building that is owned by a human organization. This building is the property of the Moth’s Club. That is a human organization. The church is something totally different. We are a group summoned together by God for His purpose. We are not a human organization resulting from man’s ingenuity or power. We are not built by good, religious people. Rather, we have been called into existence by God.

The one big idea that I hope you take with you when you leave today is this:

The Church exists because called God called it into being for one purpose – for the praise of His glory. This fact makes the church special and must be regarded as such.

This idea of the church being called is obviously found throughout all of scripture, but for the rest of our time today we are going to focus on Ephesians 1: 3-14 to see several important truths about our calling:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose

us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

In the Greek language, this passage is one long elegant sentence to paint the beautiful picture of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit beginning and completing the reconciliation and redemption of the all those who put their faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin (Grudem 1661). At the very core of this beautiful passage of scripture is the word “called”. Today we will see eight distinct aspects of the church’s calling.

1. Called Before – Election v. 4-5, 11

4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

What did God do?

- He Chose
- He predestined – determine (an outcome or course of events) in advance by divine will or fate:

When did he do this?

Before the foundation of the world

The church is not something that accidentally came into being. It is the result of God's predetermined, sovereign call (MacArthur 119).

2 Timothy 1:9 says, "(God) saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began."

Remember, God exists outside of time and space. He created those aspects of the world. He is eternal. In God's mind, there is no time frame. For Him, everything is an immediate eternal present. The church was as real to Him before the world began as it is now" (MacArthur 119).

2. Called Out – Redemption v. 7,13

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

What have we been called out of?

- Sin
- Death
- The World System

Romans 6:8-11 says, "8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." I John 2:15-17 says, "15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

The church is a redeemed community, born again by the Spirit of God.

Unredeemed people who assemble in a religious/ritualistic ceremony are not part of the Church that Christ is building (MacArthur 119).

Sadly, there are many human institutions that call themselves churches all over the world. They appear to be “alive” when really there are dead (Rev. 3:1). Rather than being called out from the world, they are part of it, in spite of all their religious activities (MacArthur 119). Such groups are only partially fulfilling the definition of a church. Yes, they are an assembly, but not a called-out assembly. Really they are just a social club that may or may not promote good morals. Having a church membership that is truly comprised of people who are saved or born-again, is so important. We don’t want to play church. We want to be a church. The church should always have people in attendance who are seeking to understand the truth of God’s Word. Never a week should go by when we don’t have unsaved people sitting in these seats listening to God’s Word so that the Holy Spirit can open their spiritual understanding and draw them to faith in Christ. However, never should a person who is still lost in sin, blind to spiritual truths, and living according to the passions of the sinful human nature be admitted as an official church member.

With membership come both privileges and responsibilities that are reserved for those who have been redeemed from sin – called out of the world. What we do not want to see at the end of time when all mankind stands before the Judgment of God is for someone who was considered a “Kitwe Church Member” to be one of those spoken of in Matthew 7:21-23 where it says,

“21 ‘Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ 23 And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

Before we move on to the next point, let me share with you a quote that can be found on a painting in the cathedral of Lubeck, Germany (MacArthur, 120).

You call Me Master, and obey Me not;

You call Me Light, and see Me not;

You call Me the way, and walk Me not;

You call Me life, and live Me not;

You call Me wise, and follow Me not;

You call Me fair, and love Me not;

*You call Me rich, and ask Me not;
You call Me eternal, and seek Me not;
If I condemn thee, blame Me not.*

In Luke 6:46, Jesus says, “*Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?*” The church is called out of sin, out of death, and out of the world. Have you truly been redeemed? Are you part of God’s church?

3. Called From – Sanctification v.4

4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

“Christians are supposed to manifest the holiness of our heavenly Father, our Savior, and the Spirit who dwells within us” (MacArthur 121).

I John 2:15-17 says,

“15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

As a church we must emphasize the importance of humility, confession of sin, and pure worship. We have been called to live holy lives. That means leaving sinful pleasures and sinful habits behind. One of the reasons we often fail to do this is because we don’t have an understanding of the holiness of God. In our pursuit of holiness, we must first recognize the holiness of God the Father and Christ.

Although God’s love should make us confident to approach Him, God’s holiness should produce within us a profound sense of awe and respect even to the point of fear if we attempted to approach Him in an unholy manner with presumptuous sins in our lives.

4. Called To – Identification v. 4-6

4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Here we see three important things about the calling of the Church that each believer is a part of once they have come to Jesus in repentance and faith.

- How God Sees Us – Holy & Blameless
- How God relates to us – As sons/daughters – children adopted into his family
- How God satisfies us – He has blessed us in the Beloved

I once read a story about a high-society luncheon where an actor was guest of honor. The host asked the famous actor to demonstrate his skill by reciting something for the guests. The actor asked for any specific requests. An old pastor in the crowd requested Psalm 23. The actor agreed as long as the pastor would do the same. When the actor finished reciting the 23rd Psalm he received much applause. However, the audience wept when the pastor was finished. The actor humbly addressed the crowd saying, “You clapped for me, but you wept for him. The difference is obvious: I know the Psalm, but he knows the shepherd” (MacArthur, 121).

As Christians, we have a special relationship with God that should be evident to the on-looking world. They should be able to identify us as adopted children of God. “Romans 8:14-17 teaches that Christians have become intimately related to God, having been adopted as His sons. That makes us joint heirs with Christ. The church isn’t a group that you join by signing your name. It isn’t merely a society committed to a system of teaching” (MacArthur 122). We don’t believe God is an all-powerful tyrant or monster waiting to step on us if we break one of His rules. Rather, we have an intimate love relationship with Him. We are called to a sweet intimacy with Jesus Christ – a personal, living relationship with God the Father. As a loving Father He has rules to protect us from what He knows will be harmful to us, but He is not waiting for us to mess up so he can enjoy punishing us. No! He desires that we trust Him and obey Him so we can experience all the joy that comes from this loving relationship.

5. Called Under – Revelation v. 7-9

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ

As a pastor, one of the most common questions I have been asked by Christians over the years has been, “what is God’s will for my life?”

Everyone seems to want to know some inside information from God. Yet sadly, many people are ignorant of the one place where such information can be found. The Bible!

“God has filled us in on great spiritual truths concerning life, death, God, man, and eternity” (MacArthur 123). He has also given us many principles for wise living. All of this is found in this book. The Bible is the very word of God, not the opinion of any man. Therefore, Christians are called to submit to the Word of God. We don’t get to need to help God out in figuring out how to run His church or run this world. God’s ways have not been proven to be outdated or unproven. Sadly, however, they have been untried by most who call themselves Christians and sadder still, they have been largely ignored by the leaders of God’s called out assembly – the church.

“When we meet together to plan. Pray, and serve the Lord, one thing should be central in our minds: What does the Word of God say about the matter” (MacArthur 123).

As I keep asking many of you why you come to Kitwe Church, I repeatedly here that it is because we preach and teach God’s Word clearly. Excellent! If we ever stop doing that then you should stop coming.

“Christians mature through the study and application of Scripture. The job of church leaders is to equip people with the “sword of the spirit, which is the word of God (Eph. 6:17). That means more than merely owning a Bible; rather, our people need to understand the Bible so they can use it as a weapon for good” (MacArthur 123). Why? Because we are in a spiritual battle.

There is a song I want us to learn here entitled, “O Church Arise,” by modern hymn writers Keith and Kristin Getty. Let me read to you the words of verse two: “Our call to war – to love the captive soul, but to rage against the captor. And with the sword that makes the wounded whole, we will fight with faith and valor. When faced with trials on every side, we know the outcome is secure. And Christ will have the prize for which he died – an inheritance of nations!

6. Called With – Unification v. 10

10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

“The ultimate purpose of God is together all things together at the completion of redemptive history.” Revelation 5 paints a beautiful picture of that day when people from every family, tribe, nation, and language will be gathered around the throne of their redeemer Jesus Christ. No longer will there be cultural, racial, or national barriers. There will be total unity caused by the one thing they all have in common – their Savior! Oh, how I look forward to that day. However, until then the Church is the symbol of that unity. We are the “sneak preview” of what is to come.

We are called to be one in the family of God. In the earliest years of my life my family was part of a church that called itself fundamental, but sadly that was a code word for “isolationist.” There was not fellowship or unity within the local church. There was suspicion and fear. People were more concerned about image than substance. People certainly didn’t let out anything about their inner selves for fear of being judged, rejected, shunned, and shamed. The leaders were more concerned about their control than the well-being of the sheep. Such an environment did not foster spiritual growth.

Our assembly meetings should be a safe place to let down our guard, confess our questions, fears, doubts, and sins so that we can help one another grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone should sense that although we hate sin, we love the sinner. And everyone should recognize that even after our salvation, we still have a sin nature. We must recognize that there is no sin that anyone has ever done that you and I are not still capable of doing. When we have these two mentalities then we will join together in unity to attack sin, but love one another.

In Philippians 2:2 Paul says that Christians should be “*of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in the spirit, intent on one purpose.*”

That is why I love inter-church fellowships, where one local church gathers with others. That is why I love conferences. We can unite with those who are equally committed to the truths of scripture to encourage and strengthen one another. Of course, there is danger in going to far. We want to avoid both extremes of isolationism and ecumenicalism. We do not want an ecumenical fellowship which promotes unity at all costs – including doctrine. We must be in agreement on the

core doctrines of the faith, but let's make sure we are not being isolationists and dividing over traditions, or small differences in interpretations. If we can agree on the major doctrines of the Bible then Scripture says there can and should be unity.

7. Called Unto – Glorification v. 11

11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

An inheritance is something that is promised at one point in time and given in another. The focus is on the future. Paul says, that in Christ we have obtained an inheritance. What is it? It is the final state that we experience only on the other side of heaven. It is glorification.

“Christians are committed to glorification. Our focus is future. We are not citizens of this world” (MacArthur 124).

Colossians 3:1-2 says,

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

Can we say that we are investing in eternal things? Sadly, I think all too often we get sidetracked by less valuable, temporary, earthly treasures.

8. Called For – Proclamation v. 12

12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

Yes, if we have been saved, if we are part of God's called-out assembly of believers in this world, then there are privileges that await us in our glorification. But notice, God has not taken us to heaven yet. The glorification is still a future reality.

That leads us to take note of an important truth. God has left us on earth for a reason. We were “called for” something. We have a job to do. We were saved to serve!

“We have been called to proclaim the glory of God's grace. God should be glorified in how we live and in what we say” (MacArthur 124).

We have been called -we have been summoned to be witnesses of God's grace! Think back over your life this past week. Have your words, actions, and attitudes pointed people to your great God? The unsaved, unbelieving world should look at us and say, "Look at the group of people. What a gracious God they have."

In Matthew 5:16 Jesus said,

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, who is in heaven."

My fellow believers, we are the primary manifestation of God in this world because many of those who are lost in sin will never read the Bible. As you live out the truths of scripture, your life may be the only Bible they read. Are you being faithful to proclaim God's glory in word and deed?

Those who are religious, but have no relationship with Christ – those who have a form of religion, but deny the power of the Gospel should look at Kitwe Church and say, "What is different there? They have God's power. They have God's peace. That must mean they have God's presence." And it should drive them to abandon empty religion and come to seek a relationship with Christ as well.

Perhaps some of you in this room would fall into that category. Perhaps you know that before you leave here today you need to respond to God's free gift of righteousness, forgiveness, and eternal life. Perhaps you need to trade in your religious activities for a relationship with Christ and become a true member of God's church – His assembly of called-out ones by putting faith in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion:

The entire church has been called into existence by God Himself. That helps to explain the church's overall success and blessing. However, we all have seen instances when a church has failed to live up to this holy calling. The weaknesses and failures of the church are explained by the fact that God has chosen to work through human agents to accomplish His purpose – His will.

We must remember that when we succeed it is because of Him, not us. When we fail it is because of us, not Him. The main goal of the church is to let God work and build His kingdom as we obediently submit to His Word and Spirit (MacArthur 118). I pray that our study of Ephesians 1 has helped us to understand the extent of what it means to be called.

If you would like to study this more for yourself, I would encourage you to read chapter 9 of John MacArthur's book, *The Master's Plan for the Church*.

Bibliography: Grudem, Wayne Dr. editor, *ESV Global Study Bible Notes* (Wheaton: Crossway Publications, 2012) MacArthur, John. *The Master's Plan for the Church* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1991)