

# Majors And Minors | The Danger Of Extremism

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

The appearance of Jesus on the Jewish scene was a dramatic collision between [grace](#) and spiritual performance. Jesus came preaching repentance and forgiveness for all people; not on the basis of their social status, their ethnicity, or their gender, but on the basis of God's generosity and undeserved grace (Mark 16:15, Luke 14:23).

*"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." | John 3:16-17, NIV*

Grace gives us what we don't deserve and cannot earn. This is why it's so frequently contrasted against the Law of Moses (the Torah), which still resulted in condemning every man or woman, no matter their sincerity or good deeds. Righteousness could never come by law-keeping, simply because it was impossible for it to be kept perfectly in its entirety.

## Straining Out Gnats, Swallowing Camels\*

Many of the conflicts that were initiated with Jesus came from the Pharisees, members of a Jewish religious party that flourished in Palestine from around 515 BCE–70 CE. The movement was marked by both a meticulous adherence to their interpretation of the Torah as well as their particular eschatological (end times) views.

The precise details of religious life were the Pharisees'

passion and the conflicts they engaged in were usually over minor issues such as fasting (Mark 2:18), sabbath keeping (Mark 2:24), eating with 'unclean' people (Mark 9:11), or attitudes towards civic duties, like paying taxes (Matthew 9:11) – all [performance-driven markers of supposed spirituality](#). They made uncompromising stands on matters of no particular spiritual importance, while issues of greatest significance were minimised or neglected.

The Pharisees 'majored in these minors', presuming that this kind of religiosity made them more spiritual and 'right with God'. In reality, they were actually inverting the spiritual values that God was really interested in, like mercy, justice, and [faithfulness](#).

They should have known better. God had already made plain to His people what He required of them. He'd already told them that He found the saccharine solemnity of their religious assemblies nauseating and the melodious noise of their songs infuriating.

*"He has told you, O human, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" | Micah 6:8, ESV*

*"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps, I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." | Amos 5:21-25,*

Jesus called the Pharisees out on their hypocrisy in the gospel of Matthew, where he says:

*“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.” | Matthew 23:24, NIV*

The Pharisees could recite the law by heart yet they couldn't have said what the heart of the law really was. They failed to see or understand Jesus had no interest in setting up rigid religious and social guidelines for his followers. His focus instead was on majoring in the majors; the gospel and the significant agendas of the kingdom of God.

## **The Danger Of Extremes**

Legalism takes different forms at different times and is often hard to pin down, manifesting itself in subtle ways.

There is much that can be said about legalism and the hypocrisy that arises from it. An emphasis on externals makes it very easy to fake what is really going inside. Promoting or insisting on conformity to these outward markers of 'spirituality' often results in people who may look spiritual on the outside but who are, in reality, suffering from deep inner turmoil and sin.

*“I know of only two alternatives to hypocrisy: perfection or honesty. Since I have never met a person who loves the Lord our God with all their heart, mind, soul, and loves their neighbour as themselves, I do not view perfection as a realistic alternative. Our only option, then, is honesty that leads to repentance. As the Bible shows, God's grace can cover any sin, including murder, infidelity, or betrayal. Yet, by definition, grace must be received, and hypocrisy disguises our need to receive grace. When the masks fall,*

*hypocrisy is exposed as an elaborate ruse to avoid grace.” | Philip Yancey*

The focus of this article, particularly in light of the global pandemic, is another issue that I believe arises from a spirit of legalism. This is the issue of extremism; when we begin majoring in the minors instead of majoring in the majors.

Right now, the world is being sharply delineated. Nearly as quickly as the virus has spread, so too has the chatter and the differing opinions about both the cause and the cure. There is an ocean of information and propaganda, together with an overabundance of access to information, some of it accurate and some of it not.

However, the most disturbing aspect of all this is the noticeable polarisation of people into two opposing groups; *them* and *us*. *And the church is not unaffected in this.*

We, the church, are being drawn into extremes, into focusing on external makers (*whether you believe covid is real or not, whether you choose to vaccinate or not...*). We're using these markers as some kind of external test of authentic Christianity and displaying the same misguided zeal for religious purity as the Pharisees of Jesus' day. We're gazing outward, looking for specks of sawdust in other people's eyes, instead of looking inward and paying attention to the plank in our own eye.

The dangers of this kind of religiousness – extremism – are as great a threat in the twenty-first century as they were in the first. As Philip Yancey comments, *“the spirit of law-keeping stiffens into extremism. I know of no legalism that does not seek to enlarge its domain of intolerance.”*

Our focus in this [global crisis](#) seems to have shifted away from our most basic and guiding principle: that is, to incarnate Christ in a darkened and impoverished world, and,

instead, Christians are showing themselves to be intolerant, judgmental, and divisive to those who think differently to themselves.

Not only that, we're being distracted from majoring in the majors; *the gospel*, and *the significant agendas of the kingdom of God*.

I think we must be careful, particularly right now, but in any circumstance, to ensure that the hills we're choosing to die on are the ones that have a cross firmly planted at their summit.

## **Majoring In The Majors: The Gospel + Kingdom Of God**

While the global pandemic is certainly is a troubling and anxious time, I don't believe *our personal opinion* about it changes anything in relation to our right standing with God. Certainly, there are considerations around [our response to the crisis](#) which must be thought about in relation to our Christian witness, and these are convictions that each Christian must personally decide for themselves, in the light of scripture.

Jesus is the only way to find right standing with God. The name of Jesus is the only means by which humanity can be saved. Jesus' performance, not our own, is what secures this extraordinary gift of grace. And in Jesus, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name, all in pursuit of His purpose.

This is what the Bible describes as *the gospel* and *the kingdom of God*. These are the major agendas that Jesus focused on and these should be our focus too.

The world is changed by our example, not our opinion. Our primary purpose and responsibility as Christians and,

collectively, as the church, is to point the world to Jesus. We do this, not by imposing our opinions or judging the world, but by *being salt and light*.

The significant agendas of the kingdom will be seen in lives that are surrendered to the guidance and leadership of God's designated king, Jesus. Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and earth, he becomes the first claimant on our affections, the motivating force in our decisions, and the final judge of our soul.

Therefore, we will also be on guard to avoid any kind of system that employs the use of 'formulas' and 'doctrines' to press good people of faith into conformity with a system instead of conformity to Christ. We will be on the lookout for cultures that promote or enable power posturing, performance preoccupation, unspoken rules, and a lack of balance.

And we will resist mindsets that seek to quantify authentic Christianity by anything other than a confession of trust in the saving name of Jesus Christ.

## **What Does This Look Like In A Pandemic?**

The ability to exercise critical thinking is an important reality for every person, but, in the end, opinions must be formed by each person for themselves and never coerced or compelled upon us by others.

Christians may therefore see a situation in very different ways but this doesn't make them any more or less Christian than each other. It's important to understand that *unity as Christians* is based on our commonality *in Jesus*, not our uniformity of thought or opinion about *non-essential* topics.

Whether I think covid-19 was created in a lab, whether I think covid-19 is no worse than seasonal flu, or whether I think covid-19 is some kind of elaborate ruse enabling Bill Gates to digitally track the world's population through microchip-

carrying vaccines, doesn't make me *any less Christian* (although, arguably, at least one of those opinions infers I'm probably less adept in critical thinking than I should be).

How we *respond* or *behave* as Christians, however, is clearly set out for us in scripture and, in this, we should be united. The Apostle Peter, when encouraging the early church in their Christian witness in relation to the pressures they were under, had this to say:

- Keep your conduct honourable ([1 Peter 2:11-12](#))
- Respect and submit to authority ([1 Peter 2:13](#))
- Love earnestly and do good ([1 Peter 1:22](#))

What I think this looks like right now, in practical terms, is this; that Christians will be people of peace, kindness, and compassion. That we'll look for opportunities to do good and love others well. That we'll give no cause for the name of Jesus to be brought into disrepute and no opportunity for the kingdom mission of God to be thwarted.

That we'll have soft hearts and open minds, willing to listen and understand, rather than judge and disparage. That we'll realise that this time of trouble, at its core, is no different to any other crisis or trouble that Christians have faced and that, in all things, Jesus is over everything.

That we'll choose to not let our differences divide us, but instead, we'll be reminded of what truly unites us.

And that we'll be people who choose to major in the majors, those things that the world needs most; the *gospel of good news* and the *significant agendas of the kingdom of God*.

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**\*The Jews had a law that forbade eating any flying insects that did not have jointed legs for hopping (Leviticus**

11:20–23), and in this, they were strictly observant. Because water could have insects and insect larvae in it, pious Jews were careful to strain the water through a cloth before drinking it. They did not want to accidentally ingest an unclean insect and thus violate the law. Jesus mentions this practice in His proverb and then contrasts it with a hyperbolic picture of gulping down a camel. In this way, Jesus accused them of taking great pains (straining out gnats) to avoid offence in minor things of little importance, while tolerating or committing great sins (swallowing camels) such as deceit, oppression, and lust. | [Got Questions](#)

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## In The Shadow Of The Empire

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

Christianity in the first century was a spiritual explosion, fueled by the reality of the resurrection of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Unlike the Jewish community, who lived and worshipped largely by themselves, Christians were active evangelists, eager to share the good news about Jesus with all who would listen. They preached Jesus everywhere, not just as the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, but as Lord, Saviour, and King; over and above Caesar.

Initially planted in the soil of Jerusalem, the gospel message soon spread rapidly beyond Israel; throughout Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the Mediterranean world. In as little as just over 10 years after Jesus' resurrection, Christianity had already reached as far as Rome itself. As Jesus had promised, his disciples were to be his witnesses, even to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8, Acts 2:41-47).



The area of [Asia Minor](#) was a huge melting pot of ethnicities and also one of the [first areas to flourish with converts to the new religion of Christianity](#). It was also part of the expansive [Roman Empire](#), at the height of its glory, and was therefore subject to Roman law and Roman customs.

Living in the shadow of the Empire would prove a difficult tension for Christians to navigate. No longer [giving allegiance to Caesar](#) as 'Lord of the earth' but instead confessing that this title belonged to Jesus Christ, how were they to behave as people *in the world but not of it*?

As *citizens of heaven*, did the laws of Rome no longer apply to them?

And, as *people of the kingdom*, how were they to live out the values of the kingdom in the society around them? Were they justified in using force to make *the kingdoms of this world the kingdom of the Lord and Christ*?

These are all important questions, not just for those in the first-century church but for every generation of Christians who have come after them.

How should Christians conduct themselves, living in the shadow of the Empire?

## **A Letter From Peter, An Apostle Of Jesus Christ**

The importance of the way a Christian behaves so as to be a credible witness for the gospel is a significant principle emphasised throughout the New Testament. It's a [theme picked up by Peter the Apostle](#) in his first letter to the early churches (1 Peter 1-5).

Discouraged by the persecution they were suffering because of their faith, Peter writes to the early churches throughout Asia Minor to encourage them and to provide wisdom and counsel

in their response to the pressures around them and in their life of Christian witness.

## **Keep Your Conduct Honourable**

Firstly, Peter urges them, *keep your conduct honourable*. They are holy people, [called out of darkness](#) into God's marvellous light. Walking in the light means [walking humbly alongside God](#), doing justly and loving kindness. Deceit, malice, hypocrisy, slander, drunkenness, sensual living; these are all fruitless deeds of darkness (Ephesians 5:11) and Peter encourages the church to choose differently, to live exemplary lives in their neighborhoods so that their actions will refute pagan prejudices (1 Peter 2:11-12).

They had been [born again](#), by the living and imperishable Word of God, new creations guarded through faith for a salvation that would one day be revealed to all. Demonstrating lives that paralleled what they preached would witness to the truly supernatural power of the gospel and its ability to effect transformation.

## **Respect And Submit To Authority**

For the Lord's sake, Christians were to show respect to all people and, particularly, to those in authority. They were to be model citizens, subject to every human institution (1 Peter 2:13). As Jesus the master had made clear during his earthly ministry, *render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's*.

Their allegiance to Jesus wasn't an excuse to engage in illegal behaviours, disrespect of their masters, or dishonour of the Emperor or his delegates. *Pay your taxes, submit to the laws of the land, pray for those who have the rule over you*.

They were to treat their service to the Emperor, their master (if they were a slave), and indeed each other as service rendered to the King himself.

The Christian life wouldn't always bring blessing, and the persecution and suffering they were currently experiencing were proof of this reality. Yet Peter encourages them to look to the example of Jesus himself, who demonstrated that the kingdom of heaven advances not through power and might, but through missions of mercy, kindness, and humility and, ultimately, through suffering.

The greatest suffering of all brought about the greatest victory for all (1 Peter 4:13-14).

## **Love Earnestly And Do Good**

They were to love each other earnestly. This was the defining mark of those who belonged to the King and it was how the world was to know they were his disciples.

Given to hospitality, they were to love with open hearts and generous lives. They were to live bright and unafraid: remembering that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it. They were to entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while continuing to doing good to all and especially to those of the household of faith (1 Peter 1:22, Galatians 6:10). *Love and do good to others just as Jesus has loved you. By this, all people will know you are his disciples.*

Early Christianity found particular expression through philanthropy; care for the poor, widows, and orphans, for those brethren who had been imprisoned or condemned, and particularly for brethren, who due to poverty, could not afford an honourable burial. The early church would often provide services for such persons, believing care in death as well as life was an active expression of love. The early Christian insistence on caring for those *made in the image of God* transformed the ancient world.

# In The World But Not Of It

*“The Christian ideal is not freedom from work, but strength to do it; not freedom from temptation, but power to overcome it; not freedom from suffering, but joy in an abiding sense of the Father’s love; not absence from the world, but grace to make the world better for our presence; not holy lives driven from the world, and living apart from it, but holy lives spent in the world and leavening it.” – Ellicott’s Commentary For English Readers.*

Like our early Christian brethren, we too continue to live in the shadow of the Empire. We too must wrestle with issues of allegiance, to show submission to those institutions and ordinances which have authority over us, yet not be conformed to this world in the process.

We may think this requires us to limit our interaction with the people around us or remove ourselves ‘from the world’, but this isn’t what scripture is concerned with. It’s the ruler of this world who is our enemy, not those who are enslaved to him; those who, like us, have also been made in the image of God. They, too, desperately need the presence of Jesus in their lives, whether they know it or not and our Christian witness in this current world is vitally important.

Jesus’ prayer for his disciples was not that God would take them out of the world but that He would protect them from the evil one. We must not be conformed to the image of the ruler of this world, nor choose his way, a path that only leads back to darkness (John 12:31, 1 John 1:5-7). Jesus prayed for the protection of his followers, knowing we are left in this world for a specific purpose; to witness to the power of his saving name. *“You are the salt of the earth,”* he said, *“you are the light of the world”*.

Our commission is to live and work, to love and forgive, to

mourn, trust, despair and hope [alongside and together with](#) our unbelieving neighbours and friends, all the while telling of the faithfulness of a good God and the hope found in the gospel message.

Our lives – our everyday, mundane, messy, uncomfortable, terrifying, joyful, and thoroughly human lives will be the greatest witness of all to the hope that lies within us.

How we conduct ourselves, as we live in the shadow of the Empire, is still just as relevant and important today as it was for our first-century brethren.

As Christians, we're now citizens of a spiritual city whose builder and maker is God, people of a heavenly kingdom, living out the values and ideals of [that kingdom](#) in this earthly life.

Yet we're also still literal citizens of the countries we live in. We still retain all the privileges that citizenship affords, together with the responsibilities it holds. *Because* we have given our primary allegiance to Jesus and, for the Lord's sake, we're to continue to submit to the laws and ordinances of the countries in which we live.

Christians have a greater not lesser responsibility to do good and model appropriate citizenship. We don't get a leave pass to flout the regulations and laws passed by those in authority, just because we're 'not of this world.' *"It is God's will that by doing good, you might cure the ignorance of the fools who think you're a danger to society. Exercise your freedom by serving God, not by breaking the rules."* (1 Peter 2:13-17)

Yet, there must be a disclaimer at this point. We also have a responsibility – a greater responsibility, it can be argued – to model the values of the [kingdom of heaven](#). This responsibility often highlights issues of injustice, prejudice or inequality which may exist both within the church and

without, issues to which God is adamantly opposed and therefore we also should be opposed.

The Atlantic slave trade, which operated between the 15th and 19th centuries, might never have been abolished, had it not been for the public agitation of those who spoke vocally against a legally sanctioned practice and campaigned tirelessly for its elimination.

Two distinct laws passed in Nazi Germany provided the legal framework for the systematic persecution and resulting genocide of millions of Jews, demonstrating that sometimes doing what is lawful isn't the same as doing what is right.

And in our own country of Australia between 1910 and 1970, at least 100,000 Aboriginal children were forcibly removed – stolen – from their parents and families as a result of various government policies, leaving a legacy of loss and trauma that persists today. The pain inflicted on an entire people through separation and forced assimilation was enabled by governmental law, regardless of the reality that it was morally repugnant to do so.

*As Christians, the law cannot be our ultimate moral guide. Slavery was lawful. The holocaust was legal. Segregation and apartheid were legally sanctioned. Many of today's laws are created to protect corporations rather than people. Simply put, the law does not dictate our ethics. God does. | Craig Greenfield*

God's values have the final word in our actions and this may mean, at some point, our choices or actions put us in conflict with the culture around us or the laws of the country in which we live. *We submit, until, for conscience sake, we can no longer submit* (Acts 5:29, Exodus 1:7).

# The Covid-19 Pandemic

For Christians, times of trouble are opportunities to test and prove our own conviction; that there is One God who rules over all things and that we remain confident that He continues to do so, even through trouble and difficulty ([Psalm 103:19](#), [Daniel 2:21](#), [Ephesians 4:6](#)).

While the early Christians faced very different times of trouble than we do today, comparable only perhaps by how we choose to respond, our faithful response is no less necessary than theirs.

The ongoing crisis of Covid-19 is a troubling and anxious time. The most recent reports regarding the virus are particularly concerning, causing fear for many people, especially the elderly and vulnerable in our communities. Whilst we shouldn't be ambivalent about what's going on around the globe, we also need to be measured in our response and very careful not to be contributing to or escalating the level of panic that people may be experiencing.

It's extremely disturbing that Christians would contribute to misinformation regarding both the virus and associated treatment options, particularly in the social domain. Many, in reality, are unlikely to be qualified to actually comment from a medical perspective, yet this doesn't seem to prevent them from offering advice, suggestions, criticisms, or conjecture on the subject.

Verified medical information shared in responsible ways is helpful; unfactual, fear-inducing conspiracy theories are not. By all means, discuss the situation with those around you but choose to do so in responsible ways, with a view to banishing exaggerated fear.

Neither is it appropriate for Christians to participate in acts of disrespect or civil disobedience of those in

authority, whilst current regulations don't directly contradict God's directives. We ought to instead continue to pray for wisdom and guidance in our own personal choices as well as for those in the difficult situation of accessing risks and making decisions on behalf of our nation.

Christians also have both a responsibility and a privilege to point the world's attention to the One who is still in control of all. We can choose to positively redirect the conversation, to comfort people's hearts and try to settle their fears, whilst still acknowledging the gravity of the current pandemic and assist in supporting practical measures to combat it.

There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God (Romans 13:1). We are to seek their welfare, to speak evil of no one, to respect the government and be law-abiding. If it is possible, as far as it depends on us, we're to live at peace with everyone. (Titus 3:1-2, Jeremiah 29:7, Romans 12:18).

We need to continue to pray, worship and connect in all the ways that are possible to us right now. Most of all, we need to continue to point the people of the world to Jesus, who told his much-loved followers: "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. Trust in God and trust in me also" ([John 14:1](#)).

## Convictions + Conduct

Our convictions and conduct go hand in hand. What we say and what we do must show itself to be in agreement.

*"We don't believe something by merely saying we believe it, or even when we believe that we believe it. We believe something when we act as if it were true." | Dallas Willard*

If we believe that God is King of all the earth and remains sovereign still, then we must act in such a way that confirms



this truth to the watching world.

We are to be thankful for those in authority and especially at a time like this, those in healthcare, who risk their own lives to treat and save others ([1 Timothy 2:2](#)). We need to remember to pray for them and assist where we can.

We ought to show responsibility in following the direction of the government and officials, acknowledging measured concern for the situation we all find ourselves in and abiding by recommendations for the good of everyone ([1 Peter 2:13](#)). Now, more than ever, is the time to show consideration and restraint and to lead the world by example. It is not the time (or ever!) for Christians to display greed or selfishness but to consider those who are our neighbour and to love them, as ourselves ([Romans 13:8-10](#)).

And, particularly, it is vitally important to consider those who are weak and vulnerable amongst our communities, who have always found a special place in God's heart ([James 1:27](#); [Psalm 68:5](#)).

*We have opportunity right now, to remind the world of a good, good God, who is actively seeking to overthrow the effects of sin in the world and restore humanity to full relationship with Himself.*

Even here, in times that seem very dark, God is still busy making all things new.

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I first wrote about [the Christian response to the pandemic](#) over a year ago, when things had really started to impact our communities. We've seen a lot happen around the world in that time and, recently, it seemed as if Australia had finally gotten a handle on things and life might be returning to

normal.

I confess, I've not personally felt any real sense of fear throughout this situation until very recently, when the various mutant strains became more contagious and seemingly more virulent. The recent restrictions in Sydney give cause for concern and Covid-19 now feels very much on our doorstep. I had to intentionally take time this week to remind myself of my faith, my conviction that God is sovereign still and that the wind and waves still know His name. Through it all, my eyes must remain on Him.

At the same time as this was occurring, three events impacted me personally and I felt compelled to again write about the situation.

One was several shares in one week on social media of what can only be described as 'doomsday' commentaries; fear-inducing and based in theory, not fact.

The second was the illegal, unmasked gathering/protest that occurred in Sydney, which was also shared on social media (whether to criticise or congratulate I couldn't say for sure, although it did appear to me to be in support of the protest).

The third was two different statements from Christian pastors within a denomination stating this: that if you chose to vaccinate, you weren't faithful, and, that if you didn't choose to vaccinate, you weren't faithful. In my opinion, this kind of religious pressure, criticism or coercion about a very personal choice is completely irresponsible and amounts to spiritual abuse, especially from those in a pastoral position.

I was reminded again of the relevance and importance of the Christian faith in our world, to provide hope, comfort, and assistance to those who are struggling, fearful, or angry. And I was reminded of the example left for us in God's Word, which seems to have an answer for every situation, of those in the early church who lived in the shadow of the Empire and navigated the same tensions with faithfulness and steadfast hope. We can learn a lot from them.

Pictured: Sculpture of Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus

# The War On Gender

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

There's a troubling trend arising in our [postmodern age](#), an era that has also given rise to 'post-truth'. New information platforms, social upheaval and the overabundance of global communication networks are giving this idea traction and we're seeing it take root and grow, with potentially devastating consequences.

This is the generation that has unequivocally waged war on 'gender'\*.

## Firstly, What Is Post Truth?

[Post-truth](#) can be summarised in the following way:

*"Truth, many will assert, is merely subjective – in reality, there is no such thing as 'truth', or 'the truth', only 'truths'; plural. These are felt differently by individuals and are as real and as true as each other. All emotions, thoughts, feelings or beliefs are correct, inasmuch as the person feels or believes them to be true. Validity and public opinion is based on emotional appeals, not necessarily connected to factual or provable information. In fact, facts themselves are potentially viewed as restrictive, negative, pessimistic, anti-society, or phobic in nature. "Post-truth is the burial of objective facts under an avalanche of emotional and personal belief. Post-truth is not only about winning votes, siding with friends, or dealing with political foes. It has more sinister effects. It is a [gaslighting](#)*

exercise.” | ([The Conversation](#)).

## The History Of Post-Truth

*“More than 30 years ago, academics started to discredit “truth” as one of the “grand narratives” which clever people could no longer bring themselves to believe in. Instead of “the truth”, which was to be rejected as naïve and/or repressive, a new intellectual orthodoxy permitted only “truths” – always plural, frequently personalised, inevitably relativised.” | [The Conversation](#)*

Post-truth discourse includes communication which is simply hot air, often a clever mix of nonsense, humour, and boldly presumptive assertions. It all sounds impressive but is never based on factual objective examination of a subject. The ‘importance of truth’ may be talked about a lot, as part of these conversations, to lend credibility to the statements or claims.

*“The proponents of post-truth communication relish things unsaid. Their bluff and bluster is designed not only to attract public attention. It simultaneously hides from public attention things (such as growing inequalities of wealth, the militarisation of democracy and the accelerating death of non-human species) that it doesn’t want others to notice, or that potentially arouse suspicions of the style and substance of post-truth politics. This engendered silence is not just the aftermath or “leftover” of post-truth communication. Every moment of post-truth communication using words backed by signs and text is actively shaped by what is unsaid, or what is not sayable.” | [The Conversation](#)*

## How Post-Truth And The War On Gender Are

# Connected

The war on gender seems to fall squarely in the camp of post-truth proponents.

We're seeing more and more, in the media, in public conversation, in our schools and communities, the push for a redefining of what is meant by 'gender' – to the point where facts and provable science relating to human biology are being discounted or ignored.

Gender has traditionally been agreed to be [determined at fertilisation](#) and confirmed (assigned) at birth. Broadly speaking, and in normal fetal development, there will be 23 pairs of chromosomes (46 in total), one of which are a pair of sex chromosomes (either X or Y). One X chromosome is always required. Two of the same sex chromosomes (XX) means the foetus is female. Two different chromosomes (one X and one Y) means the foetus is male.

Despite seeing gender clearly defined all around us as distinct and fixed (male or female), gender is now being described as 'fluid' or even non-existent. Descriptions such as 'non-binary', 'genderqueer', 'transitional' or 'transgender' are common-place. In fact, there are now over 53 recognised and accepted terms used to describe gender now found in our vocabulary.

Men and women are different in many ways. These differences include both biological phenotypes and psychological traits. Some of these differences are influenced by environmental factors. Yet, there are fundamental differences between the sexes that are rooted in biology.

*"Of particular interest are sex differences that have been identified in the brain. Although the brains of men and women are highly similar, they show consistent differences that have important implications for each sex. That is, brain sex*

*differences uniquely affect biochemical processes, may contribute to the susceptibility to specific diseases, and may influence specific behaviours. Such biological differences should never be used to justify discrimination or sexism.” | [US National Library of Medicine](#)*

A [recent conclusion](#) by Professor Robert Plomin of Kings College London, drawn from 45 years of research and hundreds of studies, is that “the single most important factor in each and every one of us – the very essence of our individuality – is our genetic makeup, our DNA.”

Yet ‘gender’, determined at the level of our DNA, is being increasingly thought of as ‘fluid’ or unfixed. ‘Gender’ can also be used to mean ‘gender identity’, now considered to be a spectrum on which you can decide, on any given day, which you ‘feel’ you are.

*“And then I found that gender can have fluidity, which is quite different from ambiguity. If ambiguity is a refusal to fall within a **prescribed gender code**, then fluidity is the **refusal to remain one gender or another**. Gender fluidity is the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change. Gender fluidity **recognises no borders or rules of gender**.” | Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us*, 1994 (emphasis is ours)*

The idea that gender isn’t rigid and fixed but rather a choice, based on feelings, is put forward as the higher ideal of utopian society:

*“Ideally, we’d live in a world where everyone could exist as whatever gender they are without constantly having to explain or defend themselves. In a world like that, we might not have to put a name to a gender. But that’s not where we’re at right now. Instead, we live in a world where gender defaults*

*to man or woman, and society at large rarely talks about genders that exist outside of that binary.” | Refinery29*

Parents are being applauded for raising their children as ‘non-gender’ or ‘gender-neutral’ (*they’ll decide when they’re older*) or withholding announcing the gender of their child at birth (as if stating a biological truth is a negative). Even asking the most natural of questions (*‘did you have a boy or a girl?’*) has become potentially fraught with disapproval.

## Gender Dysmorphic Disorder And Gender Reassignment Surgery

Reading through the [statistics regarding children and gender issues](#) is alarming, to say the least. In the UK, children as young as four are being referred for gender reassignment surgery, with 50 children a week visiting a GP to discuss gender.

*“Figures suggest a record number of kids now **believe they were born in the wrong body** and are being sent for controversial treatment.” – [The Sun](#)*

Children 11 and older are being prescribed powerful hormones to stunt puberty in preparation for future gender reassignment surgery.

Closer to home, in Australia, an estimated 45,000 school-aged children (1.2%) are thought to identify as transgender. Being transgender or gender diverse is now considered to be “part of the natural spectrum of human diversity.”

*“Gender may be the most important dimension of human variation, whether that is either desirable, or inevitable. In every society, male and female children are raised differently and acquire different expectations, and aspirations, for their work lives, emotional experiences, and*

*leisure pursuits. These differences may be shaped by how children are raised but gender reassignment, even early in life, is difficult, and problematic. Reassignment in adulthood is even more difficult.” | [Psychology Today](#)*

In the mid-twentieth century, [John Money, Ph.D.](#) helped establish the views on the psychology of gender identities and roles. In his academic work, Money argued in favour of the increasingly mainstream idea that gender was a societal construct, malleable from an early age.

[John Money's ill-advised experiment](#) in gender identity however proved ultimately disastrous for identical twins, Bruce (later David) and Brian Reimer. Reading through the [twins' story](#) and the outcome of Money's interventions is difficult and disturbing.

*“After a botched procedure for circumcision at six months resulted in severely damaged genitals, and on the advice of John Money, Bruce Reimer's parents decided to raise Bruce as a girl. Physicians at the Johns Hopkins Hospital removed Reimer's testes and damaged penis, and constructed a vestigial vulvae and a vaginal canal in their place. The physicians also opened a small hole in Reimer's lower abdomen for urination. Following his gender reassignment surgery, Reimer was given the first name Brenda, and his parents raised him as a girl. He received estrogen during adolescence to promote the development of breasts. Throughout his childhood, Reimer was not informed about his male biology. When he was fourteen, Reimer began the process of reassignment to being a male. In adulthood, Reimer reported that he suffered psychological trauma due to Money's experiments, which Money had used to justify sexual reassignment surgery for children with intersex\*\* or damaged genitals since the 1970s. As an adult, he married a woman but depression, and drug abuse ensued, culminating in suicide at the age of thirty-eight.” | [The Embryo Encyclopedia Project](#)*



Money's ideas about gender identity were forcefully challenged by Paul McHugh, a leading psychiatrist at the same institution as Money. The bulk of this challenge came from an analysis of gender reassignment cases in terms of both motivation and outcomes.

McHugh denied that reassignment surgery was ever either medically necessary, or ethically defensible. To bolster his case, McHugh looked at the clinical outcomes for gender reassignment surgeries. He concluded:

*"Although transsexuals did not regret their surgery, there were little or no psychological benefits: They had much the same problems with relationships, work, and emotions, as before. The hope that they would emerge now from their emotional difficulties to flourish psychologically had not been fulfilled."* | [Paul McHugh, Ph.D](#)

There is no doubt that there is a marked increase in children, young adults and adults who are distressed with their assigned gender. Gender dysphoria is a real and observable phenomenon. Yet surely gender reassignment is not the solution, but simply a band-aid approach to a deeper, far greater and more serious issue.

## **Intelligent Design: Let's Talk About God**

*"He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them "Mankind" when they were created."* | *Genesis 5:2 (NIV)*

The Bible, once considered a verifiable source and its author, the intelligent designer of all creation, states that humanity's genders were clearly defined from the beginning – as male and female. Bible language, throughout all 66 books, confirms this by using specific pronouns such as 'he' and 'she' – gender-specific and certainly not ambiguous. Jesus

himself believed and confirmed the Genesis record in Matthew 19:4 (also Mark 10:6), saying “Haven’t you read that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female.’”

The differences between the genders are unique and distinctive, both designed by God with purpose in mind (Titus 2:1-5, 1 Peter 3:7) (1 Timothy 3:1 – 4:16). Both genders are intrinsically valuable and precious to God, and we see His characteristics displayed by the perfect merging of both the masculine and feminine traits. These distinct genders are the fundamental building blocks of God’s creation and are part of God’s plan for His family. His definition of marriage (Genesis 2:24) and the procreation of the species (Genesis 1:28) is the natural outcome of the union of male and female and clearly supports the biological truth embedded in our DNA.

The diversity found in humanity is to be celebrated at the same time as the definitive nature of our gender is to be applauded.

Furthermore, [the church](#) (the ‘body of Christ’) is described in poetic language as a bride (female), with Christ as the groom (male) (Ephesians 5:22-33); the symbolic language echoing the reality of human biology.

*“While technically God’s design for man and woman may not be a [salvation truth](#), practically it is indispensable for every person to know and experience in order to live their lives as [followers of Christ](#) in this world, as beings created by God as male or female by design and for a purpose.” – [Crossways](#)*

Yet, the rejection of a Creator, of intelligent and purposeful design or a greater purpose at work, leads to the inevitable outcomes that we are seeing take root in today’s society. We are being encouraged to believe that there is no truth, only *truths* (each individual’s truth as true as any other), and subjective at that. Definitions and boundaries are deemed to be outdated and irrelevant.

And it seems gender won't be the only casualty to result from the post-truth era – reason and the pursuit of knowledge and understanding are being lost in the clamour of opinion and emotional verification and in their place we find an epidemic of [narcissism, arrogance and cynicism](#).

“Come now, and let us reason together”, God says in Isaiah. Although His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9), He encourages humans in the pursuit of knowledge, He takes pleasure in the reasoning of the human mind and the desire of mankind to understand the intricacies He has created.

*“It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.” | Proverbs 25:2*

## **Paul McHugh, Ph.D Has The Final Word**

*“In a [recent] interview from his home in Baltimore, where he still sees patients, McHugh explained that the “duty of all doctors who propose a treatment is to know the nature of the problem they propose to treat. The issue of transgender [people] is, the vast majority coming for surgery now don’t have a biological reason but a psychosocial reason.” While McHugh successfully lobbied for more than 30 years to keep gender-reassignment surgery from becoming a Medicare benefit, he supports the operation for those born with an intersex\*\* condition, which means having a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t fall into the typical definition of male or female. People with abnormalities of development should be helped to find their place as they see it best,” McHugh said. “But they are a tiny number of the transgender population seeking and being given treatment.” | [The Washington Post](#)*

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I recognise that this is a controversial topic and one that is being fiercely debated, all around the world and from both points of view. I also acknowledge that my opinions and thoughts on the matter are obviously based on a certain worldview and my belief in an intelligent designer (God), and that you, the reader, may not share these views. This article is not intended to be offensive or divisive in nature, but rather to open a channel of respectful conversation about a subject that is deeply important to many people. I do not encourage discrimination, hate-speech or sexism towards anyone, at any time, but, particularly in this instance, towards anyone who does not share this point of view.

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\*Historically, 'gender' and 'sex' are words used to describe and define the anatomical and physiological differences between men and women. Modern terminology uses 'sex' to refer to biological characteristics and 'gender' to refer to the individual's and society's perceptions of sexuality and the concepts of masculinity and femininity. This article is using 'gender' and 'sex', as defined in the historical sense.

\*\*This article also purposely does not address or discuss the issues surrounding chromosomal abnormalities or intersex conditions.

This article was first published 18 September 2018

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## Beneath The Skin

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

*What's beneath the skin* of our collective Christian identity?

Has Christianity lost touch with its original radical and beating heart? Are we so enamored with the power and prestige

of this present world that we have forgotten our own history?

Are we, the church, so entertained by the lights and sounds, by the choreographed music, by the dimly lit stages and almond-milk-lattes-after-service that we've forgotten the ancient truths our early Christian brethren lived and died for?

Have we become mere spectators to our own Christian faith?

## **The Birth Of 'The Jesus Movement'**

The modern western church lives a comfortable existence. She wants for nothing.

With both resources and freedom in worship and expression of faith, the church looks remarkably different today than she did in her fraught, early days. Birthed during the reign of Tiberius Caesar Augustus (14 AD – 37 AD), "the Jesus movement" initially attracted little attention from the Romans; assumed to be merely an offshoot of Judaism. Yet it soon became clear that this movement was more than a Judaistic sidenote, that it could not be contained nor extinguished and that it threatened the authority of Caesar himself.

Christians everywhere preached the news of Jesus, not just as the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, but as Lord, Saviour, and King; over and above Caesar. Unlike the Jewish community, who lived and worshipped largely by themselves, Christians were active evangelists, eager to share the good news about Jesus with all who would listen.

The first century was a spiritual explosion; fueled by the reality of the resurrection of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The preaching of the gospel found its most fruitful response amongst Gentiles – pagans – who would have formerly given allegiance to Caesar and embraced a belief in many deities.

Now, these new converts rejected their pagan gods and confessed belief in one God – the God of Israel, giving their allegiance to Jesus, His appointed Saviour and designated King. They were convinced by the witnesses who spoke boldly of Jesus' resurrection, particularly the compelling evidence of men like Paul the Apostle, also later called '*the apostle to the Gentiles*', who had seen the risen Christ for himself.

People responded, literally, in their thousands, and Rome realised it had a real problem on its hands.

*"By the end of the second century, the new faith was on its way to becoming the most forceful and compelling movement within the empire."* (Bruce L Shelley)

By simply living in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, giving him their allegiance, they had effectively rejected Caesar, a pagan ruler, and broken from the tradition of emperor worship.

This worship of the emperor, which, by AD249 had been made universal and compulsory for every nation in the Roman Empire, was primarily a test of political loyalty. Those who would not swear allegiance to Caesar and acknowledge him and each successor to the title with the words "Lord of the Earth, Invincible Power, Glory, Honour, Blessed, Great, Worthy Art Thou To Inherit The Kingdom." were branded revolutionaries and traitors of the empire.

## **The Spread Of Faith And Conviction**

Had the Christians been willing to simply formally verbalise that 'Caesar is Lord', they could have continued worshipping Jesus as much as they wanted...but the Christians would not compromise.

*What was beneath the skin?*

There are several reasons that the Christian faith experienced

such a remarkable spread, despite persecution.

Firstly, the witnesses to the resurrection were clearly possessed by a burning, unshakeable conviction as to the reality of who Jesus was and what had been accomplished in his death and resurrection. They knew that this good news had the power to transform the lives of men and women, that finally humanity had been redeemed, and that they themselves were the recipients of immeasurable grace. They simply could not keep the news to themselves and their unswerving belief, despite every obstacle (including the threat of death or actual death) could not deter them.

Secondly, the practical outworking of the Christian faith, demonstrated in acts of love, was astonishing and quite unheard of in Roman times. It was their most defining feature, remarked upon by the pagans with grudging admiration.

It found its expression in care for the poor, widows and orphans, for those brethren who had been imprisoned or condemned, and particularly for brethren, who due to poverty, could not afford an honourable burial. The early church would often provide services for such persons, believing care in death as well as life was an active expression of love for those made in the image of God.

*“Atheism (ie the Christian faith) has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar and that the godless Galileans’ care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them” | Emperor Julian, (332-63)*

As Jesus had promised, by demonstrating this kind of love, sacrificial and all-encompassing, all people knew that these believers were part of ‘the Jesus movement’. Just as *they* had

been loved, they now displayed that same kind of love for each other and others, proving without a doubt that they were disciples of the Christ.

## The Price Of Prestige

The early church flourished as a separate identity from the empire for a brief few centuries, with the struggle between Christian worship and Caesar worship defining the first 300 years of church history. Many martyrs went to their deaths, refusing to recant their faith in Jesus and give allegiance to Caesar.

Yet the church was to face a far more insidious threat in the centuries that followed; more dangerous than persecution, poverty or martyrdom. Power and prestige came to the church in the form of open favour from Rome's pagan Emperor, Constantine.

Formerly outlawed and persecuted, the Christian church now experienced a sudden reversal in fortune. But Constantine, represented as the ideal Christian ruler and ushering in a new age of salvation for the church, still retained much of his pagan origins.

*What was beneath the skin?*

*The advantages for the church were real enough but there was a price to pay. Constantine ruled Christian bishops as he did his civil servants and demanded unconditional obedience to official pronouncements, even when they interfered with purely church matters. There were also masses that now streamed into the officially favoured church. Prior to Constantine's conversion, the church consisted of convinced believers. Now many came who were politically ambitious, religiously disinterested and still half-rooted in paganism. This threatened to produce not only shallowness and permeation by pagan superstitions but also the secularisation*



*and misuse of religion for political purposes.” | Bruce L Shelley*

Did the church ever recover from this melding of state and faith, this union of empire and religion? Did she ever break loose from the seductive grasp of the pagan Caesar, no longer enemy, but sponsor and friend, and return to her first love?

Did she find again the burning conviction that Jesus alone was Lord and King over all the earth and her allegiance was to him?

At times, perhaps.

But, equally, at times, she has colluded with the powers of this world, exchanging her birthright for what amounted to a mess of pottage.

She has had, in many stages of her historical past, a reputation of being alive but *beneath the skin*, she was dying. “Wake up”, her Lord and King has implored “*and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.*”

Faithful individuals remained; arguably, the heart and soul of the church herself, but often enough, the official church sacrificed such individuals in order to appease the empire, in order to maintain control, to the detriment of humanity’s salvation.

*What lay beneath the skin?*

## **The Church Of Our Times**

What of the church today?

*What lies beneath her skin?*

Behind the powerful vocals from a vast and blue-lit stage,

beneath the skinny jeans with tastefully ripped knees, between the cleverly worded messages from the pulpit, is there still a radical and beating heart?

After asking Jesus into their hearts, do Christians still ask Jesus into their lives? The church may profess to still love Jesus *but would she die for him?*

Still. In every time and in every place, there has always been a movement, a people; the invisible church. A generation that does not lose hope in the church it sees but instead endeavours to become the church it dreams of.

As in times past, the message of good news continues to be enacted in the lives of ordinary people and in circumstances that are familiar and relatable to us all; stories of mothers and fathers, children and parents, wealthy people, and those in poverty, in bustling market places and domestic households. This collective community of faith – the church – will look different throughout time and throughout culture, yet the ancient truths remain embedded within the lives of those faithful to the message of good news.

The skin is just the outward appearance. How the church has looked, from the outside, has changed many times during the centuries. Her skin is unimportant.

But what lies *beneath the skin* is vitally important. Is there more to the church today than simply a hip social media account or a buzzing Sunday service? Is there an emphasis on substance over reputation? Is she still to be found among the simple, the humble, those deemed by this world to be foolish and irrelevant?

Or does the church sit alongside the culture of celebrity and, in an age of consumer-driven interests, is she more engrossed in giving people what they *want* rather than what they *need*.

The early believers weren't just Sunday Christians, whose most

active participation in their Christian faith was simply attending a weekly service. They didn't just turn up for one hour in the week; they shared their entire lives with each other, week in and week out.

They didn't *go to church*, they were church.

They ate and worshipped together, they divided their resources and distributed to whoever had need. They *"ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people"*. They evangelised and discipled, their conviction deeply rooted in and flowing from this focused centre; that *"one man died for everyone."* They knew that what this meant for humanity was dramatic and life-changing; effectively turning the world upside down.

Believers were added to their fellowship through baptism, *"buried with Jesus into death"*, and bound together in unity through communion, Jesus' *"death and resurrection"*. They became people of the kingdom, joined together in the fellowship of the King, the risen Christ, whose kingdom is over and above all other powers in this world.

## **Beneath The Skin**

It's imperative for the church as she now progresses into the 21st century that she reclaims this identity and the authority that is deeply rooted in and connected to Jesus, her risen king. It's vital that Jesus is truly first in her affections and that his will and sovereign rule supersedes all. It's crucial that she rediscovers the transforming power that gave her life and empowers her still.

*Beneath her skin*, there must be a depth to her character, a sense of resourcefulness and humility, sacrifice and love. She must resolve to *authentically and completely* represent Jesus to the world, not just the parts of him that are palatable. She won't be satisfied to merely speak *of Jesus* but be

compelled to lead humanity *to him*, to not just sing *of Jesus* but to baptise and disciple *in his name*. Strength and dignity are the garments she chooses to clothe herself with, and wisdom and kindness the teachings that spring from her lips.

Her form is unimportant: she knows that outward beauty can be deceitful and that it is the heart of her, the burning devotion and the fearless and uncompromising intention to live according to the teachings of Jesus, that will cause praise to rise up to God in Heaven.

The greatest hope for the church in our time and place is that we will see a passionate and stirring revival. That Christians, no matter their denomination or creed, will be emboldened to return to the foot of the cross and give their lives anew to the resurrected king. That collectively, we, the church, the ‘woman of valour’ for whom he died, will shine brightly in a darkened and impoverished world through our most basic and guiding principle: that is, to incarnate Christ.

That *beneath our collective skin* is a radical and beating heart still.

*“So come, move, let justice roll on like a river; let worship turn into revival. Lord, lead us back to you.” | insp. Amos 5:24*

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# Christianity + Missional Living

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

*"You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven." Matthew 5:14-15 | MSG*

## **The Eternal Light Of Life**

Light illuminates, not just dispelling darkness, but making visible that which is unseen. Jesus came into the world as the light and life of humanity, making visible the way to the Father (John 14:6), shining the glory and light of God and showing us the path home.

He was the way, the truth, and the life – that eternal life that was with the Father in the beginning and revealed to us in the Word-Made-Flesh (1 John 1:2, John 14:6). Whoever follows him is enveloped in his radiance and has no fear of stumbling or becoming lost in darkness (John 8:12).

While Jesus remained in the world, he was the light of the world. At his return to his Father, his light remained still, shining brightly in those who had seen and believed the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4).

They are his ambassadors; the good news about the glorious, life-giving king placed in them like treasure put in jars of clay. They know their source of empowerment is from God, not themselves, and can boldly proclaim: *"We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:14)

***They have seen God and He's not a secret to be kept.***

# Christians + Missional Living

As Christians, Jesus' earthly mission, to reveal the eternal life and light of God to the world, now becomes ours. We are tasked with the great commandment: "*love God, love your neighbour*" and the great commission: "*preach the gospel*".

We are not just followers **of** Jesus, but are led by him out of the darkness into the light, to be witnesses **for** him. We are collectively commissioned people of his kingdom, reconciled to God and entrusted with this liberating message of reconciliation – the message of light and life – for all people (Colossians 1:18-20).

The phrase *being on mission* or *going on mission* has commonly been used to refer to those who travel overseas, often to poorer countries, to preach and teach the gospel. They are sent into these areas by their 'home churches' to promote their faith or provide services such as education, literacy, social justice, health care, and economic development, as an outworked ministry of their faith. Primarily seen as evangelism, *mission work* is rarely described as something that is undertaken locally, rather, something a Christian would participate in or be involved with overseas.

*Missional living, missional churches, or missional communities* are also phrases that have become popular in recent times. You may have heard them used in podcasts, online sermons or discussed by various authors. You may have assumed these phrases are referring to a special kind of Christian living or community; one that operates differently to 'regular' or 'traditional' Christian life or church.

*However, the reality is that, as Christians, we are all on mission, right here, in our quiet, suburban neighbourhoods and in our bustling city streets.*

The word "mission" is derived from the Latin *missionem* (nom.

*missio*), meaning “act of sending” or *mittere*, meaning “to send”. The word mission (Latin: *missio*), as a translation of the Greek *apostolē*, “a sending,” appears once in the English New Testament (Galatians 2:8). An apostle (*apostolos*) is one commissioned and sent for a purpose and we find the word *apostle* mentioned over 80 times in the New Testament.

The theme of *mission*, or *sending*, particularly in relation to God’s mission, can be found all throughout scripture. His active involvement in humanity’s story and His promise of reconciliation and redemption was finally realised in the greatest mission of all, the *sending* of His son, Jesus the *apostle* (Hebrews 3:1)

*“Just as You commissioned and sent me into the world, I also have commissioned and sent them (believers) into the world. I do not pray for these alone [it is not for their sake only that I make this request], but also for [all] those who [will ever] believe and trust in me through their message, that they all may be one; just as You, Father, are in me and I in You, that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe [without any doubt] that You sent me.” | John 17:18, 20–21, Amplified Bible*

Just as Jesus was sent into the world, to witness to the eternal life and light of God, so each Christian has been commissioned and sent as an ambassador for Christ. They have been authorised, by virtue of his saving work, to represent his kingdom and to carry the great treasure of the good message in their fragile, imperfect lives of clay.

They have been commissioned by Jesus himself, who declared “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:19–20; compare Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, John 20:21–22, and

Acts 1:8).

Jesus lives in and through them and God has placed each one of them like a city on a hill, to bring light to the whole world. They are to glow – with their open houses and generous lives – like homecoming beacons, drawing all humanity to the light that comes from Him, that in this, ‘His name is glorified’.

The reality is that *every. single. Christian.* is a missionary and *every. single. church.* is missional. It’s the very nature of our Christianity and an intrinsic part of our identity as people of the kingdom.

I am a missionary. You are a missionary. We are all missionaries. And we don’t need to be anywhere else apart from where we are right now to *run on mission*.

## **Like Salt, Like Light...**

‘*Living on mission*’, ‘*living missionally*’ or ‘*missional living*’ is simply the way in which we choose to order and arrange our ordinary, everyday lives; springing from a life framed by grace and pointed in pursuit of King Jesus. It means that we live out his life, his words, his actions and his love towards others; attempting to show *his* love by *our* actions and *his* truth by our *lives*.

Jesus first declared to his disciples, “follow me and I will make you fishers of men” Missional living, therefore, flows from ‘following Jesus’ and representing him in the world, shining in it like light and flavouring it like salt.

The people around us that we interact with, in a thousand ordinary ways, all experience the same joys and difficulties that we do, turning, as we are, on the wheel of life. They have the same questions that we do, the same challenges that we face, and, most importantly of all, are formed in the same image that we are, the image of God Himself.



Living missionally means showing genuine interest in other people, simply because they are *human*, just like us. It means being curious about them, their children, their lives, and their passions.

Like Jesus, we celebrate with them in all their joys and grieve with them in all their losses.

*“On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples.” | John 2:1-12, ESV*

*“When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus wept.” | John 11:33-35*

We are called to share the good message – that the gospel is able to speak to the heart of every human need – and, as missionaries (in our own backyards!), we look for opportunities to share this hope. In every relationship we encounter, we are acting as ‘*ones sent*’ for Jesus.

It means loving people well, being generous with our time and our resources, and open with our lives, that in doing so, we’ll prompt them to ‘open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.’ Our lives – our everyday, mundane, messy, uncomfortable, terrifying, joyful, and thoroughly human lives will be the greatest witness of all to the hope that lies within us.

*So throw open all your doors! Be generous with your lives! Live bright and unafraid: remembering that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.*

# Missional Churches

All believers are ambassadors for Jesus' name and the reality of the church includes not individuals simply gathered together in a building, but a collective kingdom and priesthood of people, worshipping and witnessing together to the astounding truth of the gospel narrative and the risen king.

What happens, then, when Christians, 'living on mission', regularly gather together? Each individual Christian is personally on mission – this is a key aspect of their Christian identity, but the truly exciting thing is that now, collectively, these people become a 'church on mission'. The *being* and the *doing* of missional living doesn't change, it just multiplies!

Like the miracle of the loaves and fishes, Jesus' presence permeates their gatherings and multiplies the fruit of their labour. 'Like yeast through dough, or like stars appearing one by one as the night sky darkens', these local expressions of the church of Christ can cross all earthly boundaries, prevailing against even death itself. The world has never known anything like them. (Jonathan Leeman)

*"I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."... | Jesus, Matthew 16: 18-19, BSB*

*"Christ did not die just to save us from sins, but to bring us together in community. After coming to Christ, our next step is to be involved in community. A church that does not experience community is a parody, a sham. Simply put, the purpose of the church is to stand for God's eternal purpose. In short, wherever the church gathers together, its guiding*

*and functioning principle is simply to incarnate Christ.” –  
Frank Viola, Reimagining Church*

## **Missional Christianity = Intentional Christianity**

Whether a church is a ‘mega-church’ or a ‘home-church’, has five members or 500, is only made up of over 50’s or is an eclectic mix of ages, it should always, by definition, be ‘missional’. That is: intentionally living as a collective community representing the king and his mission.

A Christians’ individual life is no different. The great commission to preach the gospel and take the good news of Jesus to all the world was given to all believers. We see this commission of witness declared firstly in [Matthew 28:18-20](#) and shown to be affirmed throughout the letters of the Apostles to the church.

Missional living, therefore, isn’t a special kind of Christian identity. It’s the *only way* of viewing our Christian identity and, by extension, our corporate church identity. Missional Christianity is being intentional in our Christianity, open to the work of the Spirit in our own lives and the lives of those around us, active in our communities, and purposeful in our involvement in the mission of God, the great ministry of reconciliation.

We carry, every day in our bodies, the death of Christ so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed (2 Corinthians 4:7-10). Through us, others can also be empowered and equipped to receive and live out the gospel message, demonstrating God’s mission in all aspects of our lives, both personally and as church communities.

This is the essence of what it means to live a missional Christian life.

*“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” | Acts 2:42-47, ESV*

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## **Why Belonging To A Local Church Isn’t Optional**

The last six months have been an unsettling and disruptive time for millions of people around the globe. The impact of COVID-19 on our ordinary routines and daily habits has been, in many cases, bewildering. The ways in which we would usually connect have had to adapt to these new and strange times – and it seems we’re not out of the woods just yet. Our lives may not return to normal any time soon, if, in fact, at all.

### **COVID-19 Discloses A New Reality**

COVID-19 has also brought to light just how busy and frantic *normal* actually was and, for many people, the slower pace and limited ability to travel too far afield has come as a welcome relief. This has been an unexpected opportunity to slow down and ‘smell the roses’, enjoy time with family, working or learning at home and passing lazy afternoons with nowhere

particular to be; apart from in the garden or buying essentials at the supermarket!

For others, however, the sense of isolation and abandonment has been acute. Loneliness, anxiety and depression have been constant companions, with no assurance of when things might return to normal. Being able to still connect, albeit in the online space (hello Zoom!), has been critical for many people to support their mental health and maintain a sense of community and belonging.

For many Christians, however, the inability to 'go to church' (ie to gather physically together in a building) has uncovered a new reality; one that has perhaps laid hidden and undisturbed beneath the surface of our busy, ordered, *normal* lives.

What has been exposed is the troubling reality that when habit or routine no longer forces us to physically show up to church, we quite often stop showing up emotionally. Our connection to church – to the local expression of the body of Christ – is revealed to be a shallow, top-surface connection, driven and maintained only by habit. As soon as the opportunity to exit has materialised, we've opened the door and welcomed it with open arms. Physically, we may have been attending church, but emotionally, we've been long gone.

## **Is Church-Going Important?**

The necessity of finding other means to connect as a church and the resultant disconnect for many Christians has highlighted important questions: Why do Christians gather anyway? Is 'going to church' even important?

Nearly 50% of Australians believe that church-going is no longer relevant. Out of a list of 13 facilities and 10 services that people agree a community needs, including foods and cafes, parks, libraries, local childcare and sports

facilities, relationship seminars and support or social activities for seniors, a local church comes in at 13 and 9 respectively (only just ahead of English classes and migrant support, in the case of the latter).

Clearly, for many people, church-going is not only personally irrelevant, but it's also considered practically superfluous to a community's needs. At a time when the ability for gathering together in person has been greatly limited, increased disconnect from 'church' has been, for many Christians, a sobering reality.

Yet the Bible tells quite a different story. It describes [the church](#) as an essential reality, in vibrant, organic language; as a body, a vine, a family, a woman, a building of living stones, a kingdom. It describes the church as a single identity, made up of many individuals, with the ability, as a corporate reality, to affirm and give shape to the lives of each Christian who becomes a member. It reminds us that when we choose the King, we are also choosing the King's people.

*"The starting point of the Christian life is an unqualified trust in the power of Jesus' death and resurrection to save humanity from sin, a trust that comes to individuals through grace and by faith. Once that trust in Jesus has been born in us by the Spirit, then our baptism signifies our willingness to commit ourselves to God, to submit to the lordship of Jesus, and to identify ourselves not just with the church but as the church." | Lucy Peppiatt*

Paul the Apostle speaks at length about the connection between the individual and the church. He comments in the book of Corinthians that "God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it". This body of believers is governed or directed in all its functions by the head, who is Jesus.

It's remarkable that God has designed the human body – every

part dependent on every other part – as a working model for understanding our lives together as a community of believers (1 Corinthians 12:27).

## How Do We Identify Ourselves Not Just With the Church But As The Church?

Why is it important for a Christian to feel like they not only have a local church they call ‘home’ but that they truly belong there? How does a Christian identify not just with the church but as the church?

*“A local church is a group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ’s name to officially affirm and oversee one another’s membership in Jesus Christ and his kingdom through gospel preaching and gospel ordinances.” | Jonathan Leeman*

Acts 2:42-47 describes not only *how* but *why* the first Christians began gathering themselves together. They were a new organic identity, citizens of the kingdom of God, ‘called out to follow and serve King Jesus’. These new Christians regularly gathered together to honour God and His Son, to grow in community, to grow together spiritually, to give themselves in service and to share and witness to the good news of the risen King. We describe these collective [Christian activities](#) as ‘worship’, ‘fellowship’, ‘discipleship’, ministry’ and ‘evangelism’.

The local church is the tangible evidence of the reality of the kingdom of God. Church people are [kingdom people](#), living in a fellowship under King Jesus, with lives that “are literally connected to things before the creation of the world and extending far into eternity” (Ecclesiastes 3:11) (Matter Of The Heart).

Gathering together as a local church is therefore a public declaration, to both fellow Christians and to the world, that

an individual has submitted to the rule of King Jesus and that their allegiance has been transferred to him. It affirms that each person gathered is a person of the kingdom, for whom Jesus is Lord. It's how one Christian says to another Christian: *"What! You too? I thought I was the only one."* (C S Lewis)

Through Christ's work on the cross, Christians have been made his body, his family, his temple, his people, his flock, his joy and crown. But they only become these things collectively, never individually. *"Christianity isn't meant to simply be believed; it's meant to be lived, shared, eaten, spoken, and enacted in the presence of other people. Try as I may, I can't be a Christian on my own. I need a community. I need the church."* | Rachel Held Evans

The Christian life, as it turns out, is a package deal. If you choose the King, you must also choose his people.

## **Why Belonging To A Local Church Isn't Optional**

The biblical imperative of belonging to a local church is an important and often neglected conversation. The idea of committing can seem uncomfortable, even legalistic for some people. For many Christians, the experience of church has been one of hurt and disillusionment.

Not every church hurts people, but most churches have hurt someone at some point, simply because churches are made up of imperfect people. This reality can leave people reluctant to re-engage, afraid of being hurt again, wanting to protect themselves, and questioning the place of the church or even God in their lives.

*"Christians need relationships to grow. We don't grow in isolation; we develop in the context of fellowship."* | Rick Warren



Yet despite all the imperfections that can be found within a church or the fact that a church can (and will) mess up and get it wrong, it's the way we're supposed to 'do life together' as Christians.

Jesus didn't say that he would 'build Christians', but that he would build 'his church', purchased with his own blood and of which he is the chief cornerstone (Matthew 16:18, Acts 2:28, Ephesians 2:20). His language is organic, inclusive and corporate. His church, as an instituted organic reality, has authority and governance that an individual Christian simply doesn't have

Church isn't just something we go to, it's the tangible evidence of the reality of the kingdom. Church isn't just an event we attend, it's a fellowship we belong to (1 John 1:3, Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 1:9). Choosing a church home – choosing to belong to a local church – isn't optional but essential for a Christian.

*'The local church enables the world to look upon the canvas of God's people and see an authentic painting of Christ's love and holiness. The local church lays down a pathway with guardrails and resting stations for the long journey of the Christian life.'* | Jonathan Leeman

## **What If I Don't Feel Connected to My Church?**

The church was born from the death and resurrection of Jesus and He continues to be the source and lifeblood of the church. Any life or energy a church possesses must flow from him, the risen King. Christ's rule – in the life of the church and in the hearts of its members – is absolute. Jesus is Lord.

If you're struggling to feel a sense of connection or belonging to your local church, we'd suggest there are two

possible reasons for this:

**1. Jesus is Lord of your heart, but unfortunately, he's not the Lord of the church you're part of.** This is a difficult situation to be in but not without hope. Our suggestion is to pray about this and then engage in open and genuine conversation with the members of your church. Gently voice your concerns and suggest ways to encourage the church to 'return to its first love'.

One of the seven churches named in the book of Revelation, the church at Ephesus, faced a similar situation. They are commended by Jesus for being diligent in good works and for their perseverance, their intolerance of heresy, and their endurance of many hardships in his name; but they had lost their warmth and zeal for Jesus.

*"Relationship had simply become religion and passion little more than cold orthodoxy. The first love which characterised the Ephesians was the zeal and ardor with which they embraced their salvation as they realised they loved Christ because he first loved them (1 John 4:19) and that it was, in fact, his love for them that had made them "alive together with Christ." So overwhelmed were they by the joy that came from understanding their former state—dead in trespasses and sins—and their new life in Christ, that they exhibited the fruit of that joy (Ephesians 2:1-5). Because of God's great love for the Ephesians, they were "made alive in Christ" and that new life was exhibited in the passion of gratitude." |*

[Got Questions](#)

**2. Jesus is Lord of the church you attend, but not the Lord of your heart.** This is a more challenging situation and perhaps the place to start is where your Christian life first began: with the reality that '*greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends*' (John 15:13).

Supreme love was demonstrated and made visible in Jesus' death

on the cross and it's in this sacrifice that we also see the love of God, that *'while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.'* (Romans 5:8). Remind yourself that you are deeply loved and comprehend the fact that, in Jesus, you are forgiven and set free, fully reconciled and made right with God. You are His dearly loved child and a citizen of His kingdom, saved by grace through faith alone and not because of anything you have done. As Christians, we belong to God and He loves us with the love of a perfect Father (John 14:18, 1 John 3:1).

Give your heart entirely and with no hesitation to the King who died for you and everything else will flow from there.

If you're struggling with your identity as a Christian or want to understand more about God's work of grace in your life (and how that causes radical transformation), I would highly recommend reading the following two books: *"What's So Amazing About Grace"* by Phillip Yancey and *"Emotionally Healthy Spirituality"* by Peter Scazzero.

The Christian life isn't always easy and the next step isn't always clear. Sometimes we need courage to take that step and sometimes we just need to stand still and watch God go to work for us.

## **A Glorious Reality: The Church of Christ And It's Local Expressions**

*"Picture, if you will, a globe with all the nations of the world mapped out on it. Now picture one little embassy of light. It's a gathering of Christians, gathered together in the name of their King, Jesus. Then the point of light divides itself into two, then four, then eight, and so it goes.*

*A new nation is growing, a nation set inside the nations. The new nation leaves the boundary lines on the map where they are, but it cannot be contained by the map's lines.*

*The line makers don't have the authority to stop these unworldly citizens. The points of light cross all boundaries, spreading everywhere like yeast through dough, or like stars appearing one by one as the night sky darkens.*

*These are the churches of Christ and their members. The world has never known anything like them."* | Jonathan Leeman

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# The Church | A Woman Of Valour

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

This article is dedicated to the memory of William Tyndale (c 1490-1536), an active and passionate Christian writer and translator, whose historical influence on the translation of the Bible into English cannot be overstated. Tyndale was convinced that the Bible alone should determine the practices and doctrines of the church and that every believer should be able to read the Bible in his own language *"The church of Christ is the multitude of all those who believe in Christ for the remission of sins, and who are thankful for that mercy and who love the law of God purely, and who hate the sin in this world and long for the life to come."* – William Tyndale

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In my recent article, '[The People Of The Kingdom](#)', I noted that **the church is the tangible evidence of the kingdom of God**. Church people are kingdom people, living in a fellowship under King Jesus, with lives that *"are literally connected to things before the creation of the world and extending far into*

eternity" ([Ecclesiastes 3:11](#)) (Matter Of The Heart). By looking more closely at how the Bible describes the church, we will also see what the advancement of this kingdom of God looks like, in reality, demonstrated in the lives of those men and women who gather together as the church.

## What Does 'Church' Mean?

Our English language Bibles were translated from manuscripts written primarily in two languages; Hebrew (in the Old Testament) and Greek (in the New Testament). The translative history of the Bible is a fascinating journey, from an academic and historical perspective, and is well worth exploring. You can [read more about the translation process here](#).

In the New Testament, the word translated into English as *church* is not actually a translation or even a transliteration of the original Greek word. The translators of the first English language Bibles generally elected to use the English word *church* (which had emerged first as the word *kirk* and finally evolved through the centuries into the word *church*), as an English equivalent of the original Greek word. The first usage of this word 'church' in English was as a building in which religious meetings were held, but eventually it came to be used for the people in the building too. By the time translators began translating the Greek manuscripts into English, it had been in accepted use in English for a long time. In all truthfulness, however, it wasn't an accurate translation of *ekklesia*, which is the original Greek word.

The original Greek word used in the New Testament – *ekklesia* – is a compound of "ek" (out of) and "klesis" (calling), a derivation of "kaleo" (call). A literal meaning would be "a calling out" or "the called out." An *ekklesia* was originally a select civil body, summoned or convoked for a particular purpose and the word, in and of itself, didn't have any religious meaning attached. In Acts, the word *ekklesia* is used

of a riotous mob (Acts 19:32 and 41) and also used to refer to a lawful gathering in Acts 19:39.

*Ekklesia* should perhaps be more accurately translated in English as *assembly* or *congregation*. However, the King James Version, the 'authorised' (and most commonly read) translation for many years, renders it *church* some 76 times, *churches* 36 times, and *assembly* three times. Most other translations follow the KJV's example. Essentially, the translators chose to replace *ekklesia* for another Greek word (*kuriakon* which, by this time, had already made its way into English as 'church').

Despite this, it would be true to say that the word *church* is now an extremely established and recognisable word in our modern English, and it has been used for centuries as the English equivalent of *ekklesia*, however erroneous the original translative methods were.

## But What Does Church *Really* Mean?

Today, most people would understand the word *church* to mean one or all of three things:

1. A **place of worship** (the original meaning of the word *kuriakon* ('*belonging to the Lord*'))
2. A particular **denomination or religious group** within Christianity (when attached to a name, for example, an *Anglican Church*)
3. A **body of Christian believers** (*the church*)

The primary goal, when trying to understand the use of the word *ekklesia* (in the context of the Bible's original meaning) is not necessarily to reinstate a truthfully accurate translation of the original word (although that would, of course, be a more proper process of translation) but to correctly understand the **meaning** of the original word. We know that words change meaning over time and also that it's not the word itself that is important, but how we understand and use

that word. Do we talk about and describe the church in the same way, today, that the first-century authors did? (For the sake of continuity, we will discuss the biblical meaning of *ekklesia* in this article using the established English equivalent *church*).

The Bible never speaks of the church in the sense of a building or organisation. Neither does it speak of the church in the sense of a particular denomination. The biblical definition of church is actually about the people – those who place their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation (John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 12:13). These people are the global community of believers who gather together in ‘local expressions of church’. The Apostle Paul describes this community like the human body, a living thing – made up of real people (1 Corinthians 12:12). The New Testament authors don’t describe many churches but one, simply expressing that ‘*where two or three are gathered in my [Jesus’s] name, there am I among them.*’ (Matthew 18:20).

In the early years of the church, these gatherings were known, for example, as *the church that met at Corinth* (1 Corinthians 1:2), or *the church at Ephesus* (Ephesians 1:12), communities acknowledged to be the one body of the Lord ‘scattered abroad’ (Acts 8:1-4, 1 Peter 1:1). The church is about people – **the people are the church, the *ekklesia*** – called out, connected in relationship by Jesus Christ and assembled together for a purpose.

There’s a very real sense that many Christians are returning to this original meaning behind the word used by the New Testament writers; that is, to view and speak of the church as an *organic identity*, made up of ‘people who are called and gathered together as a community in Jesus’.

## A ‘Called Out’ Community

In the first few chapters of Acts, we read of the birth of the

church in a rush of wind and fire; a pivotal moment in history where people begin responding to the call of the gospel and the announcement of Jesus as the risen king and saviour. Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-36 'cut many of the listeners to the heart' and his life-changing teaching regarding Jesus caused many to receive his words with gladness, believing that Jesus was both the risen Lord and [Christ](#) (Acts 2:36). This belief and repentance of their sin was demonstrated by them being baptised – 3000 people in one day!

Acts 2:42-47 describes how these individuals began gathering themselves together as a community 'called out to follow and serve King Jesus'. We begin to get a sense of the reason for the use of the word *ekklesia* by the apostolic writers to describe the formation and purpose of this one body of believers.

Throughout Acts, there are examples of the believers meeting together as a community and the purpose of these gatherings can generally be summarised by five key elements:

To honour God and His Son – '**worship**'

To grow community – '**fellowship**'

To develop personally – '**discipleship**'

To provide service to others – '**ministry**'

To share the Good News – '**evangelism**'

Being 'called out' is a common theme in the New Testament:

- Jesus came to **call** sinners (Matthew 9:13, Mark 2:17, Romans 8:30).
- By God's [grace](#) and mercy, He **calls** people from among Jews and Gentiles to be His people (Romans 9:24-26).
- The believers in Corinth were **called** into fellowship with Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9).
- God **calls** believers to [peace](#) (1 Corinthians 7:15).
- The **calling** is by the grace of Christ (Galatians 1:6).
- The believers in Galatia were **called** to [freedom](#) (Galatians



5:13).

- Paul implored the saints at Ephesus to walk in a manner worthy of their **calling** (Ephesians 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 2:12).
- The believers at Colossae were **called** in one body (Colossians 3:15).
- God **calls** believers into His own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12).
- God **calls** believers to conduct their lives in holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:7, 2 Timothy 1:9, 1 Peter 1:15).
- God **called** the believers in Thessalonica by the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14).
- God **calls** believers out of darkness and into His marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).

These passages all cite the original greek word *kaleo* ('to call' or 'called') and have to do with a believer's relationship with God and their connection to His eternal purpose. We can also see the connection here with the use of the Greek word *ekklesia* to describe the collective community of 'called out' people – believers that assemble together.

## Metaphors For The Church

Other metaphors are used throughout the Bible to describe the community of believers, one of which is that believers form a spiritual 'house' – living stones to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

Another metaphor is the human body, a living thing – made up of real people (1 Corinthians 12:12). Paul devotes a whole chapter in the book of Corinthians to the principles and purpose of 'church' and how each 'member' of the body is to be valued for the diversity and contribution they bring to 'the body'.

This metaphor of a body is further expanded as yet another metaphor, that of a particular kind of body, the body of a

bride; the fiancée and intended wife of 'the lamb' (John 3:29, Revelation 3:12). We are given to understand from Ephesians 5 that the relationship between Jesus and the church wasn't modelled on the first marriage but, in fact, it was the other way around. God had the church in mind from the very beginning and our understanding of marriage is therefore modelled on the relationship that would exist between Jesus and his bride. Therefore, if we want to understand how the church, as the bride, relates to Jesus, we are to look to marriage and the examples given in both the record of creation in Genesis and Paul's writings in the New Testament. Marriage is our human way of experiencing and understanding how we, together as one body, relate to Jesus as his church.

*"A wife should put her husband first, as she does the Lord. A husband is the head of his wife, as Christ is the head and the Savior of the church, which is his own body. Wives should always put their husbands first, as the church puts Christ first. A husband should love his wife as much as Christ loved the church and gave his life for it. He made the church holy by the power of his word, and he made it pure by washing it with water. Christ did this, so he would have a glorious and holy church, without faults or spots or wrinkles or any other flaws. In the same way, a husband should love his wife as much as he loves himself. A husband who loves his wife shows he loves himself. None of us hate our own bodies. We provide for them and take good care of them, just as Christ does for the church, because we are each part of his body. As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother to get married, and he becomes like one person with his wife." This is a great mystery, but I understand it to mean Christ and his church." | Ephesians 5: 22-32, CEV*

## **The Birth Of The Church**

We are to think of the church – this community of believers – as a woman, a woman whose very life and existence were framed

by the death and resurrection of a man. Through this man's death and sacrifice, she is created and at his resurrection, she becomes a living creature. We see the obvious echo in the story in Genesis of the creation of Eve from Adam's side:

*"The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion for him who corresponds to him." The Lord God formed out of the ground every living animal of the field and every bird of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them, and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man named all the animals, the birds of the air, and the living creatures of the field, but for Adam no companion who corresponded to him was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was asleep, he took part of the man's side and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the part he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one will be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."| Genesis 2:20-23, NET*

What an eloquent phrase: *'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'*! Adam looks at this new creation and exclaims *"this is my very own self, from my very own body"*. She is man's counterpart, not merely in feeling and sense – his flesh – but in his solid qualities. We also have another significant phrase – *'taken out of'* – echoing *'the call'* that goes out in Acts 2. Here in Acts, we read of people being *'taken out of the dominion of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of light and life'*; visible proof of the power of the Gospel to bring about a new creation. Without the death and resurrection of Jesus, there would be no church, no new creation, no bride. The insistence of the critical reality of the resurrection of Jesus being connected to the fulfillment of the gospel promise was the firm teaching of the first century Apostles and this remains the solid framework of the existence of the church

today.

*“Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel.” | 2 Timothy 2:8, NIV*

The woman in Genesis is the man's possession, not in the sense of ownership, but rather in the sense of belonging. She is from him and of him, they belong together and are as one body. Paul comments on this being 'profound' and that ultimately, he is referring to the church's relationship with Jesus (Ephesians 5:32).

## A Woman Of Valour

The word used of Eve at her creation is the Hebrew word *ezer*, which is translated as '*helper*' in English. However, our understanding of *helper* falls far short of the original sense of the word, which is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe God as a helper to His people or of a king to his subjects. The primary idea of the word lies in '*girding*', '*surrounding, hence defending*', to '*protect or aid*'. The counterpart, therefore, to the man is "*a woman of valour, whose worth is incalculable*" (Proverbs 31:10).

We have this extraordinary *woman of valour* fleshed out in more detail in Proverbs 31:10-31; a famous passage celebrating 'the virtuous woman (or wife)'. We would perhaps understand *virtuous* to mean '*having or showing high moral standards*', but the original Hebrew words *eshet* and *chayil* used in these verses don't convey virtue or virtuousness in the same way we would understand '*virtuous*' today. The Hebrew word *eshet* is the construct form of *isha* (woman) and *chayil* connotes bravery (Psalm 76:5); capability (Proverbs 12:4); triumph (Psalm 118:16); or strength (Psalm 84:7). In the 17th century (when the first English Bibles were translated) *virtuous* still suggested the French '*virtu*', which at the time meant '*manly*' or '*brave*.' A better translation of the Hebrew words *eshet*

*chayil* is 'woman of valour' (as translated by the Tanakh Jewish Bible (1917)). This *virtuous woman* is the same woman who is also, in the King James translation, 'clothed in strength and honour' (Proverbs 31: 25).

If marriage is modelled on the church and her relationship to Jesus, then it's not such a stretch to recognise the ideal woman in Proverbs as a detailed portrait of what the well-functioning, organic body of the church looks like.

*"She obtains wool and flax, and she is pleased to work with her hands. She is like the merchant ships; she brings her food from afar. She also gets up while it is still night, and provides food for her household and a portion to her female servants. She considers a field and buys it; from her own income, she plants a vineyard. She begins her work vigorously, and she strengthens her arms. She knows that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out in the night. Her hands take hold of the distaff, and her hands grasp the spindle. She extends her hand to the poor and reaches out her hand to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all of her household are clothed with scarlet. She makes for herself coverlets; her clothing is fine linen and purple. She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes. She is clothed with strength and honour, and she can laugh at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and loving instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also praises her..."*  
| Proverbs 31: 13-22, 23-28

What a remarkable description of the capable, industrious, joyful reality of the organic church; a living, breathing *woman of valour*, of which every believer is a member and valued part.

# The Bride And The Lamb | The Story's Resolution

Yes, Christians are stones making up a house (1 Peter 2:5).

Yes, Christians are branches connected to a vine (John 15:1-7).

Yes, Christians are subjects and citizens of a kingdom (Ephesians 2:19).

Yes, Christians are children of a heavenly Father (1 John 3:1).

Christians are all these things. But these are still metaphors for the individual. It's only when we consider marriage, as a metaphor of the church and the king being brought together, as one, that we understand that the Christian life isn't intended to be experienced as individuals but as a collective community. The church – the *woman of valour* – is created from the body of Jesus, who was crucified, buried and raised the third day, just as the first woman was taken from the first man. Together, Jesus Christ and the church are one body. She, the church, is the bride of Jesus and He, Jesus, is the spotless lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:22-23, Ephesians 4:4, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Acts 20:28, Colossians 1:24, Revelation 13:8).

The first two chapters of Genesis are where we first discover God's eternal purpose for humanity. The last two chapters of Revelation tell us of the glorious resolution of God's story. And Paul's words in Ephesians assert the *"supremacy and centrality of Jesus Christ in all this, together with his counterpart, the church, which should dominate our understanding of everything physical and spiritual."* – Frank Viola

*"Christ did not die just to save us from sins, but to bring*

*us together in community. After coming to Christ, our next step is to be involved in community. A church that does not experience community is a parody, a sham. Simply put, the purpose of the church is to stand for God's eternal purpose. In short, wherever the church gathers together, its guiding and functioning principle is simply to incarnate Christ." – Frank Viola, Reimagining Church*

*"Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him the glory. For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready." | Revelation 19:7, BSB*

*"The heart of her husband has confidence in her, and he has no lack of gain. She brings him good and not evil all the days of her life." | Proverbs 31:11-12, ESV*

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### **Author's Comment: A Further Brief Note Regarding The Translation Of 'Church'**

The English language was first spoken as a Germanic dialect, known as Old English or Anglo-Saxon, beginning in northern England some years after the Anglo-Saxon conquest (circa 449 AD). The earliest written Old English, however, did not appear until approximately 800 AD. Probably sometime around 500 AD, the people in northern England started referring to a building erected for worship as a *cirice*, later, *chirche*, and finally, a *church*.

By the time William Tyndale translated the New Testament from Greek to English (known as the "Tyndale Translation", 1525 AD), the word *church* had been in use for centuries. Throughout these centuries, the state church had maintained its power over the people through bloody crusades against resistance groups for the sake of "doctrinal purity." It was claimed that the Apostle Peter had started the church (based on Matthew

16:18); and therefore the church should be lead by a clergy and not placed in the hands of any "congregation or assembly." Not only that, prior to the fourteenth century, a complete Bible in the English language, for the common people, didn't exist. Even for modestly educated clergy, the Bible was mostly inaccessible – available only in the Latin language and in large folio copies of two or three volumes. These Bibles were ridiculously expensive, limited in number and difficult to access. For the most part, the clergy had to rely on the small portions of scripture that were included in prayer books.

In his translation of Matthew 16:18, Tyndale rightly translates the Greek word *ekklesia* as *congregation*, as opposed to the word *church*, signalling a return to a correct understanding of the organic reality of the church. Tyndale's accurate translation of this one word threatened the power and control of the entire state church system. Knowing Tyndale's translation was soon to become public, to be read by the common people in their own language, presented a real threat to the power of the religious institution of the day. Tyndale was told to amend his translation. Despite being threatened by the religious leaders of his day, William Tyndale would not revoke his translation of the word *congregation*. Ultimately, he was betrayed, sentenced to death, and burned at the stake in 1536.

In 1604, King James of England and Scotland commissioned a new translation in response to perceived problems or flaws with earlier translations which did not "*conform to the ecclesiology and reflect the episcopal structure of the Church of England and its beliefs about an ordained clergy*". Instructions were given to the translators that the new version would conform to the ecclesiology of the Church of England (which, by now, had broken with and was directly in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church). As such, certain Greek and Hebrew words were to be translated in a manner that reflected the traditional usage of the church, now long-entrenched and in common use. Ecclesiastical words such as *church* were to be retained and not to be translated as *congregation*.



The King James Authorised Version was published in 1611 and quickly grew in popularity. It still remains a significant and popular English translation today. Unfortunately, however, the inaccurate use of the word *church* to replace the original *ekklesia* became firmly embedded in most translations with many readers unaware of the problematic nature of its translative history.

Can we unravel and reverse nearly 500 years of linguistic and cultural understanding that now surrounds the word *church*? Can we edit and reprint millions upon millions of editions of the Bible in English, which, in truthfulness, used a word that was an inaccurate representation of the original? Should we withdraw every copy of errant English Bibles from circulation, simply because it contains the word 'church'? Is it possible to determine what was genuine translative prerogative or suspect ecclesiastical bias, then or now? The answer is clearly 'no' to all these questions.

A better solution, perhaps, and one worthy of investing our energy and resources to, is to rediscover the original meaning that the New Testament writers had in mind – the organic reality of a community of believers – and to speak, think and believe this of the church today, recognising that wherever the church gathers together, its guiding and functioning principle is simply to incarnate Christ.

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## People Of The Kingdom

[Deciding to become a Christian](#) has its origins in believing the things about Jesus, certainly, in an intellectual sense; who he is and what he came for – but there's more to it than that. We are also choosing to surrender to his guidance and leadership in our life as a willing subject of God's designated king.

Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and earth, he

becomes the first claimant on our affections, the motivating force in our decisions and the final judge of our soul (Matthew 28:18-20, Isaiah 9:6, Luke 1:33, Acts 10:36, 1 Corinthians 15:27, Colossians 1:27, Romans 8:10, Ephesians 3:16, Acts 10:42, John 5:22. 2 Timothy 4:8, James 1:21, 1 Peter 2:25).

Becoming a Christian is, therefore, primarily a matter of the heart; a reorienting of our life and decisions in line with our allegiance to the king.

## The People Of The Kingdom

An intrinsic part of our identity as Christians is to recognise that we have given our allegiance to the king and that we have been transferred into his kingdom (Colossians 1:13). This kingdom's advancement, day by day in the lives of those who surrender to King Jesus, is demonstrated in a kingdom community that we call 'the church'. **The church is the tangible evidence of the reality of the kingdom of God.** Church people are kingdom people, living in a fellowship under King Jesus, with lives that *"are literally connected to things before the creation of the world and extending far into eternity"* (Ecclesiastes 3:11) (Matter Of The Heart)

Yet, for many Christians, the 'kingdom of God' is something that takes place solely in the future. Jesus' words *"the kingdom is near"* (Luke 17:20-21) are understood to mean, in reality, "the kingdom is coming at some later time, that time being hundreds or even thousands of years away". The idea of 'the kingdom' is as a future hope for faithful Christians, only realised at the return of Jesus, and not as a present reality. Entrance to this 'kingdom' (in the future) is by believing in Jesus now, receiving the forgiveness of sins in baptism, and then living a morally faithful life; and this is commonly described and preached as 'the gospel of good news' (in its entirety). In other words, *"I am a sinner. I need saving. I believe Jesus came to save me. In Jesus, I am*

*forgiven (I hope! – one can never be too sure) and I hope to be in 'the kingdom', at some point in the future (again, all going well)."*

Yet the kingdom of God – the sovereignty and rule of God – has always existed and will always exist (Psalm 47:7, 1 Chronicles 29:11, Exodus 15:18, Psalm 103:19). 'The kingdom' existed in the past, it exists now and it will exist in the future. Our hope, as Christians, is not just some distant, far-off expectation but a reality that exists right now as we choose to yield to Jesus' rule and live 'kingdom lives' under his dominion. Believing in Jesus and being baptised doesn't just grant us forgiveness of sins; through God's grace, we also receive an entirely new identity; our small, individual stories becoming part of the much bigger story that is being told. We become kingdom people right now! (Matthew 13:38, Philippians 3:20-21, Ephesians 2:19).

## Five Things That Make A Kingdom

**Kingdom = King + Rule + Realm + Law + Land.** Here are some thoughts about the idea of 'kingdom' in the Bible:

1. A **kingdom** is a people governed by a KING. The king is God; He has always been king, ruling firstly through *theocracy*, then by *monarchy* and now through *christocracy*. The kingdom of God, therefore, has gone through many phases, one of which was the phase exhibited during the time of Israel's monarchy. A reasonable chunk of the Old Testament is dedicated to the telling of this story. You can [read more about this in the article 'Jesus, King Of The World'](#).
2. The king must RULE over the **kingdom**. In biblical language, this is always firstly redemptive, and then secondly by governing.
3. There has to be PEOPLE for there to be a **kingdom**. In the Old Testament (OT), this was the nation/**kingdom of Israel**. But Israel, like a tree, has deep roots and grafted-in branches, seen in the New Testament (NT) to be the church (which does

not replace Israel but expands it) (Romans 11:1-28).

4. A **kingdom** must have a governing LAW. In OT times, this was achieved through the Torah, also known as the Law of Moses. When Jesus (God's perfect king) arrived, he didn't destroy this law but fulfilled it completely, and by his life, death and resurrection, a greater law came into being – the Law of Cruciformity; loving as Jesus loved. Jesus stated that the entire law of the new covenant, the law which governs people of the kingdom, is summarised in these words "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Love others as much as you love yourself." (Matthew 22:37-40, CEB)

5. A **kingdom** must have a LAND. Land is big in the OT and moving into the NT, we see the 'tree of the kingdom' expanding to (eventually) encompass the whole world (Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:3-32). In the past, this has been, at various phases, in literal places like the Garden of Eden or the land of Israel. But right now, 'the land' is wherever 'the church' (the community of kingdom people) takes up physical space. Wherever kingdom people reside, God, in Jesus, rules. One day, this kingdom will fill all the earth and God's rule and glory will be seen in all things – as He intended from the beginning (Numbers 14:21, Habakkuk 2:14, Matthew 6:10, Revelation 21: 1, 4)

This reality – that church people are kingdom people – is one of the most ***exciting and empowering aspects of a Christian's existence in this life*** – we are living for the king! So why don't we talk much about kingdom living or being kingdom people? And why don't we speak more often of the church as the kingdom community?

## **Soteriology: "Small-Story" Gospel**

Well, here's what I think the reason might be. For many Christians, the gospel of "the good news of the kingdom of God" (which, incidentally, is what Jesus came preaching!) has unfortunately been reduced to simply a system of personal

salvation and sin management. It has become a **gospel of soteriology alone**; a doctrine of salvation which has somehow become disconnected from the larger big-story **gospel of ecclesiology**; **theology about the nature and structure of the church**.

The truth is; when we are saved by Jesus, God also brings us into family and puts us in community! The gospel is not just about our own personal salvation but includes larger theological implications of ecclesiology – that Christian people, gathered together, are church people, who are kingdom people!

*“The movement that has long called itself “Evangelical” is in fact better labelled “Soterian.” That is, we have thought we were talking about “the gospel” when in fact we were concentrating on “salvation.” | Scot McKnight*

If we have a small-story gospel understanding, our trajectory as a Christian may go something like this: we (individually) repent, we (individually) are then baptised...and then life gets kind of weird for a lot of Christians. We’re saved – but what now?

At this point, Christians can become obsessed with getting other unbelievers ‘over the line’ (saved!) but still aren’t really sure what to do with them after that. Our Christian lives seem mostly about sin management (ourselves or for others) and we can tend to also be a little self-absorbed in this. All we know of ‘gospel’ is that we’re sinners who need saving. Others are sinners who need saving. ‘Christian living’ (gospel living) is only about being, firstly, saved from sin and then executing a moral life thereafter.

Christianity can take a sudden and exhausting turn into the territory of works-based living, eventually leading to [church burnout](#) and, for many Christians, [the question of whether church-going is even relevant anymore](#).

Don't get me wrong. **Sin is absolutely a problem for us, as is mortality.** It is the thing that separates us from a whole relationship with God and absolutely needs addressing in our individual lives as well as in the collective human experience (Isaiah 59:2, Isaiah 53:6, Acts 3:19, Galatians 5:19-21, Romans 5: 12-21, Hebrews 7:25).

But the problem with thinking the gospel is only about personal salvation or forgiveness of sins is that we fail to recognise we are being invited into something much bigger than just a solution for our own individual stories. When we receive the good news of the gospel, our little stories are actually becoming intertwined and woven into God's larger kingdom story. We are supposed to begin experiencing life, personally and collectively, as people of the kingdom, connected to something that extends far into eternity. The fascinating reality of the gospel is that *"we are invited into a story that is bigger than our culture, bigger even than our own imaginations, and yet we get to experience it and tell that story to others with the particularity of our own moment and place in time"* (Rachel Held Evans).

*"The good news is as epic as it gets, with universal theological implications, and yet the Bible tells it from the perspective of fishermen and farmers, pregnant ladies and squirmy kids. This story about the nature of God and God's relationship to humanity smells like mud and manger hay and tastes like salt and wine...It is the biggest story and the smallest story all at once – the great quest for the One Ring and the quiet friendship of Frodo and Sam." | Rachel Held Evans*

When we become a Christian, we become a kingdom person, living in a fellowship with other kingdom people. Church isn't just something we go to, it's the tangible evidence of the reality of the kingdom. Church isn't just an event we attend, it's a fellowship we belong to. It's the Fellowship of the King! (1

John 1:3, Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 1:9)

## A New Day In An Old Story

While our individual salvation is absolutely bound up in what we have come to describe as the gospel, the good news that was preached in the first century had its roots in a much older, much larger story, that of the long-promised king and saviour of the world. The power of Jesus' sacrifice and the wonder of [his resurrection](#) form the foundation of a Christian's faith and hope but it is the fact that Jesus is **the Christ** ("the anointed one"), that is at the heart of the gospel (2 Timothy 2:8). Our forgiveness and redemption sits inside this much larger gospel message – that of the rule and dominion of the king. Recognising the gospel as "the good news of the kingdom of God" (which, in the gospel of Matthew is also called the kingdom of heaven) helps correct our gospel theology and realign it to the larger story that's being told. **You are part of a much bigger story than your personal salvation alone!**

Author Scot McKnight argues that Western Christians conceive 'the kingdom' too individualistically.

*In both the Old and New Testaments, God's kingdom is defined in terms of God's people. This reality means that one may not put the kingdom and the church in antithesis. On the contrary, "you can't be kingdom people without being church people". McKnight, in fact, claims that "there is no kingdom now outside the church" and that "there is no kingdom mission that is not church mission" (The King Jesus Gospel pages 79, 87, 96). Kingdom living consists, then, of the church being the church – "liv[ing]" together "as a fellowship under King Jesus" (p.99). | Scot McKnight*

"When Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God, he was preaching much more than personal salvation for the individual. He was preaching "a new day in an old story – the

story of God the King – and God as king in King Jesus. The one gospel is about Jesus the lord, the king the messiah and the saviour. This is the story that alone makes sense of Jesus' choice of the word kingdom to explain the mission of God to the world." (Scot McKnight)

*"Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force." | Matthew 11:11, NASB*

*"From then on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!" | Matthew 4:17, NIV*

*"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, Repent and believe in the good news! | Mark 1:15, NIV*

*"Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst." | Luke 17:20-21, NASB*

## **The Significance Of "The Kingdom"**

"To grasp the significance of the message of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus, we can also resort to a statistical analysis. The term *basileia* (kingdom) occurs 162 times in the New Testament and 121 of those are in the Synoptic Gospels where the preaching of Jesus is recorded. The formula "kingdom of God" or the "kingdom of heaven" occurs 104 times in the Gospels. This message is not only the inaugural message of Jesus and the focus of His great Sermon on the Mount, it is



his final message. “After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). The gospel of the kingdom includes the necessity of salvation since the very message begins with the call for repentance, but it goes beyond the call to salvation and includes the demand for kingdom-focused living. **It insists that we are saved for a purpose.**” – SBC Life

*‘Kingdom redemption’ is the work of God, through Jesus, and by virtue of his sin-solving cross and new-life creating resurrection, unleashed to those who are needy because of their sins. Any kind of “redemptive” activity that does not deal with sin, that does not find strength in the cross, that does not see the primary agent as Jesus, and that does not see it all as God’s new creation life unleashed is not kingdom redemption, even if it is liberating and good and for the common good. | Scot McKnight*

The kingdom of God is more than social justice or personal salvation. ‘The kingdom’ is the promise of God from the beginning to fill the earth with Himself and to rule justly in the hearts and lives of all humanity. It includes the promise of total reconciliation with humanity; only made possible in Jesus (Ephesians 1:11-12, 1 Timothy 1:16-17, 2 Timothy 4:18, 1 Peter 4:11, Romans 11:36, Revelation 1:16).

And if we want to know how Jesus understands the collective Christian life – ‘church life’ – the place to begin is with what he called the kingdom of God. When we think of the church – the one body of Christ, the community of believers, we need to understand how this connects in tangible, relatable ways to the ‘kingdom of God’ and how we see this illustrated in the people of the kingdom today. A true and full telling of the gospel must include the reality of the church, not as individuals gathered together in a building but as a kingdom of people – priests, rulers and images bearers on behalf of

the King – King Jesus.

*“For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” | Colossians 1:13, ESV*

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**Author’s Note:** This article should in no way be taken to imply that ‘the kingdom of God’ is merely spiritual. Jesus’ context was, clearly, the nation of Israel and historical implications are at work for these people who had been chosen to be God’s witnesses. The idea of ‘the kingdom of God’ was certainly consistent with the Jewish hope of a saviour and the arrival of the one who would be the ‘consolation of Israel’. The prophet Isaiah speaks poetically about the one who would bring peace, justice and righteousness again to Israel. This national hero would be from David’s royal line and Isaiah predicted that his kingdom would have no end.

Jesus was born to be king, destined to inherit the ancient throne of David, his royal ancestor, and to rule wisely and well, not just over Israel but over the whole world. Not only was he the descendant of David and therefore the legitimate heir to the throne of Israel, he was also the Son of God and therefore the promised saviour of the world. The confluence of these two important aspects is no coincidence and we can only be astonished at how God chose to bring all these things together to achieve His purpose.

God has in no way forgotten his promises to individuals or to groups of people and implicit in that are literal promises to the people of Israel that still await fulfilment (Isaiah 52:7-9, Luke 2:25, Acts 26:6).

“And he shall set up a banner for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” Isaiah 11:12, NASB

**“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” – Micah 5:2, NIV**

**“Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?” – John 4:42, NIV**

**There are many layers to God’s great story, which finally converge in Jesus. “Jesus is all of Israel’s major leaders and more, he’s a new Moses and especially a new David and a new Solomon and a new servant and a new son of man and whole new redemptive order. His name – *Yeshua* – means ‘he will save his people from their sins’ (Matthew 1:21). The story is that in Jesus God now rules and God’s kind of ruling is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, and reconciling.” (Scot McKnight)**