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R. C. SPROUL

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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Chapter One

Sanctified People, Sanctified Space

On a trip to the Holy Land, I visited one of the most important tourist sites in Jerusalem: the Dome of the Rock. This monument is one of the holiest Islamic shrines in the world. I was intrigued that as we approached the entrance, our guide spent five to ten minutes carefully instructing us on the proper protocol for entering into this sacred place. For example, we could not escort our wives by holding on to their arms because that gesture is deemed

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inappropriate for such a holy place. And, of course, we had to take our shoes off before entering.

Isn't it interesting that religions of all sorts, all over the world, have their sacred sites, their holy places? Christians often think of the church as a building, a structure, a place where people gather for worship and religious activities. For that reason (among others), many people think they can do without the church. "I don't have to gather with other people in order to be a Christian," they think. "I can worship right where I am. I don't need the church."

In our culture and in our nation, many people express disenchantment with the institutional church, and many people feel that the church has let them down and has not met their expectations. We don't often find people excitedly saying, "Oh, how I love the church!" There is a disconnect here, because we know with certainty from Scripture that Christ loves the church. And if we are of Christ, we can't possibly fail to love, or even despise, what is so loved by Him.

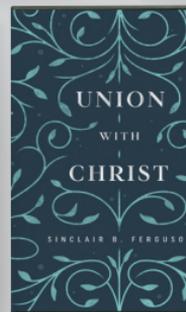
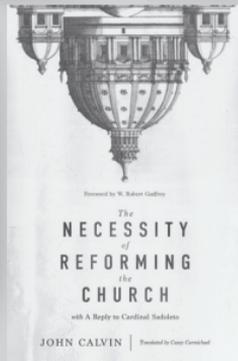
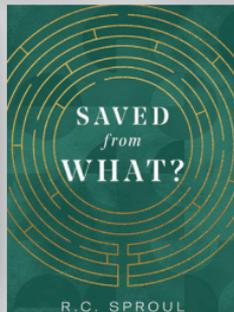
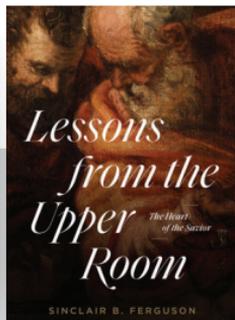
What I hope to do in this book is offer an apologetic or a defense of the church. I want to define what the church is, to explain what the church is made up of, and to explore the church's vocation and mission. In this way, I hope to

lay out how vital it is for Christians to be joined to a body of believers.

We can quickly discover through our study of Scripture that the church is not a building—it is people. Yet even in the Scriptures, particularly in the Old Testament, the place of worship was very important to the religion of Israel. If you recall, the tabernacle was built according to the detailed provisions and commandments of God. The articles that were placed in that structure were crafted by men who were uniquely endowed by the Holy Spirit to perform their tasks. And the garments of the priesthood of Aaron were intricately designed by God's command. The same kind of detailed consideration was articulated by God for the building of the temple.

So if the church is not a building, why should buildings mean anything to us? It seems we've lost much of the mystique of former ages regarding church buildings. Church architecture has changed. Rarely do we see a new church building constructed in the Gothic style with vaulted ceilings and flying buttresses. A lofty sense of transcendence used to be communicated by the very building itself. Most of our church buildings today are designed in a more functional way. They're built to facilitate fellowship. In many

We want to see men and women
around the world connect the deep truths
of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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