

S T U D Y G U I D E



Communion of Saints

by R.C. Sproul



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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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Introduction

In the Apostles' Creed, Christians confess, "I believe in . . . the communion of saints." The Westminster Confession of Faith also speaks of this "communion of saints" that we have with other believers by virtue of our union with Christ. We are said to be "united to one another in love" and to "have communion in each other's gifts and graces." The fact is that if we are believers, we are part of a body: the body of Christ—the church.

The doctrine of the church, however, has fallen on hard times. We live in a "pull yourself up by your bootstraps," ruggedly individualistic age, and the idea of community has largely been forgotten. But Christians are not meant to live out their lives in isolation from other believers. Each Christian is a necessary part of the body of Christ. Each Christian requires the other body parts to survive. A hand or a foot that is separated from a body cannot live and cannot function by itself. And the body cannot function properly without the hand or the foot. The church needs the individual Christian, and the individual Christian needs the church.

May this series enable you to understand the importance of the church—the communion of saints—as well as the importance of your fellowship in it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R.C. Sproul". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the initials "R.C." clearly visible at the beginning.

R. C. Sproul

Sanctified People, Sanctified Space

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Who loves the church? In our day, not too many people, even professing Christians, would say that they “love” the church. People, by and large, have become disillusioned with the institutional church. There is one, however, who loves the church even though He is aware of her flaws. In fact, He loves the church so much that He purchased her with His own blood. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul introduces the biblical idea of the church, the bride of Christ.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to articulate the biblical meaning of “the church”
2. To be able to explain why Christians historically have established sacred places of worship

QUOTATIONS

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

—Ephesians 5:25–27

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.

—1 John 3:14

LECTURE OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. Who loves the church?
2. In this day and age, many people have expressed a serious disenchantment with the visible institutional church.
3. We don't often hear people elatedly proclaiming, "Oh, how I love the church!"
4. But even if none of us love the church, we know with certainty that Christ loves the church, and if we are of Christ, we cannot possibly despise what is so loved by Him.

B. Sanctified Space

1. Quite often, when we hear the word *church*, we first think of a building, a structure where people gather for worship and other religious activities.
2. Although the church is, according to Scripture, first and foremost a people, we do see in the Bible that buildings have had an important place in the history of worship.
3. The tabernacle was built at the express command of God according to specific and detailed plans.
4. The tabernacle was crafted by men who were uniquely endowed by the Holy Spirit for their task.
5. When the tabernacle gave way to the temple, God gave the same kind of detailed instruction for its construction.
6. If the church is not a building, why should buildings mean anything to us?
7. Church architecture has changed; churches are rarely built today with vaulted Gothic ceilings.
8. Most church buildings today are built in a more functional way to facilitate fellowship.
9. But wherever people are religious, they establish sacred buildings.
10. A hierophany is an outward, visible manifestation of the sacred.
11. We want to see in our church buildings a distinction between the secular and the sacred, between the profane and the holy.
12. The theologian Mircea Eliade observed that the front door of every church is a threshold; when you step over it, you leave behind the secular and profane and enter into the presence of the holy.
13. While we recognize that God cannot be contained in buildings made by hands, we cannot ignore how basic it is to our humanity to set apart certain times and places for special significance.
14. That is what we try to do with church buildings; we try to make a building that is different.

C. Sanctified People

1. The word translated "church" in our English Bibles is the Greek word *ekklesia*.
2. The Greek word *ek* comes from *ex*, which means "out of" or "from."

3. The root of the word *ekklesia* is the word *kaleō*, which means “to call.”
4. In terms of its etymology, the rudimentary meaning of the word *church* is something or someone that is called out of something else.
5. The *ekklesia* is the community of people who have been called by God out of the world.
6. In ancient Israel, this calling out was symbolized by the calling of the people to corporate worship with the *shofar*, a ram’s horn.
7. The sounding of this horn was the signal that the time had come to leave one’s daily tasks and assemble in the presence of God.
8. The call to assemble would also include a prophetic summons, a call to worship.
9. The English word *church* also has a Greek linguistic derivation.
10. Along with such other words for “church” such as *kirk* (Scottish), *kerk* (Dutch), and *Kirche* (German), the English word *church* derives from the Greek term *kuriakē*, which is a form of the noun *kurios*.
11. *Kurios* is the Greek word for the English word *Lord*, and the *kuriakē* are those who belong to or are possessed by the *kurios*.
12. The church, then, is made up of those who belong to Christ the Lord.

D. The Bride of Christ

1. One of the most important images of the church found in Scripture is the image of the bride of Christ.
2. The roots of this image are found in the Old Testament imagery of God’s taking Israel to be a people for Himself.
3. God entered into a solemn covenant with Israel, and vows were made both by God and by Israel.
4. When Israel disobeyed God’s commands, the prophets responded by condemning Israel for harlotry and adultery.
5. In the New Testament, the imagery reaches a whole new level.
6. The church is called the bride of Christ because Jesus purchased His people, paying the ultimate price with nothing less than His own blood.
7. The bride He purchased was “damaged goods,” but He has promised that He will present His bride without spot or wrinkle because He loves her.
8. Who loves the church? Christ loves the church.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What do most modern people usually think of first when they hear the word *church*?
 - a. Rome
 - b. The “bride of Christ” metaphor
 - c. A building
 - d. The New Jerusalem

2. The church is, according to Scripture, first and foremost _____.
 - a. a building
 - b. a people
 - c. an idea
 - d. a feeling

3. _____ is an outward, visible manifestation of the sacred.
 - a. An anthropomorphism
 - b. A theophany
 - c. A hierarchy
 - d. A hierophany

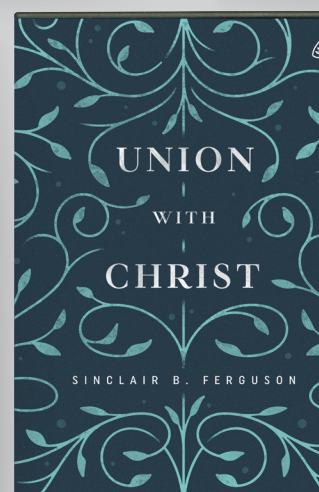
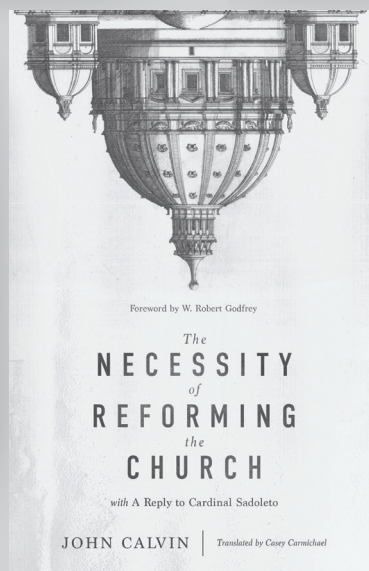
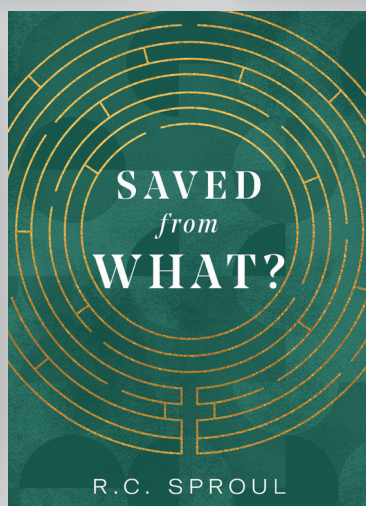
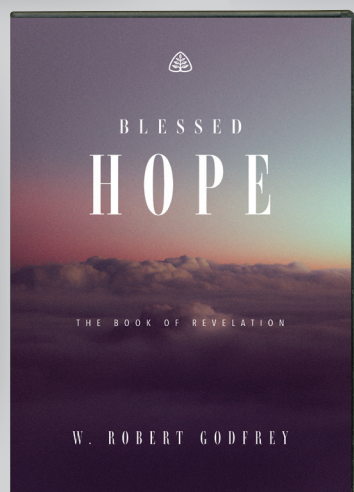
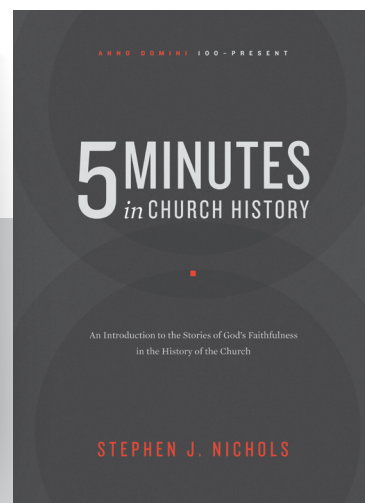
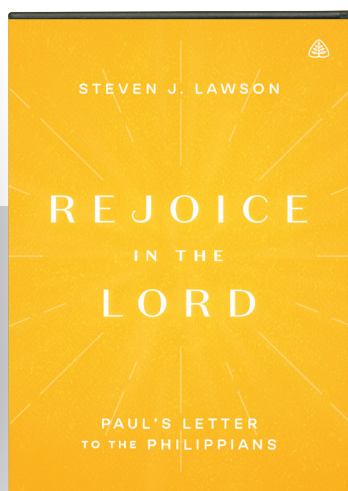
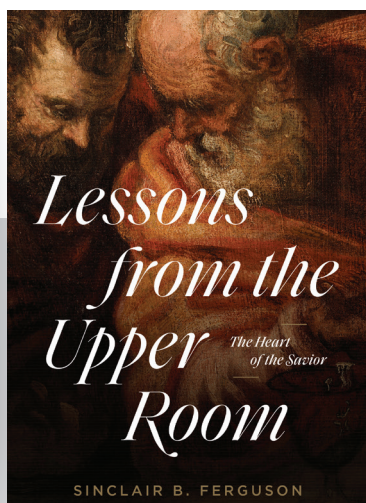
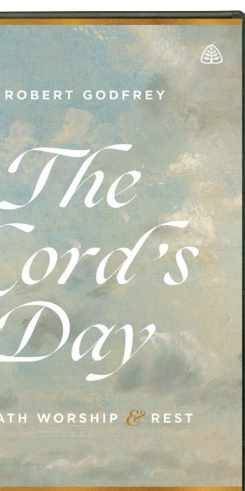
4. The theologian _____ observed that the front door of every church is a threshold; when you step over it, you leave behind the secular and profane and enter into the presence of the holy.
 - a. Etienne Gilson
 - b. Vigo Auguste Demant
 - c. Mircea Eliade
 - d. Jacques Maritain

5. The word translated _____ in our English Bibles is the Greek word *ekklesia*.
 - a. church
 - b. Lord
 - c. bondservants
 - d. ecclesiastical

BIBLE STUDY

1. Read Exodus 26–28. What kind of importance does God place on the building of the tabernacle in these chapters? How is the sanctity of certain spaces communicated in the architecture of the tabernacle?
2. Read Hosea 1–4. What does God command Hosea to do? Why does He command Hosea to do this? To what does God liken Israel in Hosea 2? How does God describe Israel's sin in Hosea 4?
3. Read Ezekiel 16 and 23. How do these texts, which condemn Israel's sins, contribute to our understanding of the nature of the relationship between God and Israel? How seriously does God take Israel's faithfulness or lack thereof?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 5:25–33. How do those texts describe the relationship between Christ and the church? What is described in Revelation 19:7–8? How does Revelation 21:9–27 describe the Lamb's bride?

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