

ChalcedonReport

MINISTRY NEWS FROM THE CHALCEDON FOUNDATION®

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What is the Church?

The definition of Christ's church is important for several reasons, but for Christian Reconstruction it's crucial. The authority of Christ places a limit on all institutions, particularly church and state, because His will is the liberty of His people to apply their faith and advance His Kingdom.

Many Christians today still associate the word *church* with a building, a Sunday service, or a structured institution with a hierarchy of leadership whether episcopal, presbyterial, or congregational. However, when our Lord spoke of *ecclesia*, was He referring to a physical structure or a formal organization as we know it today, or was He was describing a people called out to fulfill God's will on earth?

In a recent episode of the Chalcedon Podcast, Mark Rushdoony, Martin Selbrede, and host, Andrea Schwartz, explored vital truths about what the Bible says about the church, and how believers today can reclaim the original vision of *ecclesia* with the goal being faithfulness in our generation to advancing Christ's Kingdom.

The Biblical Idea of the Church

Andrea began the discussion by noting that Jesus only used the word *church* (*ecclesia*) twice in the Gospels. The *first* occurrence is in Matthew 16:18, where Jesus says to Peter, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." The *second* appears in Matthew 18:17, where Jesus instructs His followers on handling disputes: "And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector." Andrea noted that in neither instance did it suggest that Jesus

was referring to a central location or a formal institution. Instead, He was speaking about a group of people who would serve as His representatives on earth however they were organized. She posed the question to Mark Rushdoony: "So, Mark, in these two passages, Jesus is not referring to a building. He's not referring to a hierarchy. Exactly what is He referring to?"

Mark responded by explaining that *ecclesia* means the *called-out ones* and is equivalent to the Old Testament assembly of God's people. He elaborated, "It's the reference there to the *ecclesia* as the called-out ones... It's equivalent to the assembly, the *people of the covenant* as it was used in the Old Covenant." He went on to explain that the term *ecclesia* was not new to Jesus's audience. It had been in use for centuries in Greek culture, where it referred to an assembly of citizens called together to make decisions for their city-state.

This historical context sheds light on the words of our Lord. He was not speaking of a passive audience or an institution run by a hierarchy—although structure is there—but *of an active body entrusted with governing under God's authority*. Mark noted that, "The citizens of a city-state were *called out*, usually in a time of crisis, where a government had to be renounced or replaced. The people had to take control of the government, so they were called out to an assembly to now reform or change the city in some way."

This challenges the common assumption that the church is merely a religious institution or identifiable only by its hierarchical structure. Instead, the vision for the church is a governing assembly of God's people tasked with shaping society according to His law.

How the Church Became an Institution

Andrea then asked how the meaning of *ecclesia* shifted from a governing assembly to a hierarchical institution. Mark pointed to one reason found particularly in the influence of the King James Version. When King James authorized his translation of the Bible, he required that *ecclesia* be rendered as "church" rather than "assembly."

"One of the real unfortunate things about the King James Version... They were ordered to use the word *church*. Now, the church implies institution," Mark explained. This translation choice reinforced the idea that the church was primarily an organization rather than a people.

This institutional focus led to hierarchical structures that centralized authority in church leadership rather than equipping believers to govern their own lives under God's Word. Over time, Protestantism inherited many of the same structural tendencies that had characterized Roman Catholicism. Mark noted that the church began to assume authority that rightly belonged to Christ alone.

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Martin added that this shift created a dependency on clergy, where laypeople viewed themselves as passive recipients rather than active participants in God's Kingdom. The church was no longer seen as a dynamic force for cultural transformation but as a place for religious observance.

The Church as a People, Not a Place

Andrea pointed out that many Christians today still view the church as a physical location, as evidenced by common phrases like "going to church." She asked whether this reflects a deeper misunderstanding of the church's nature.

Martin agreed, stating that over time, language has reinforced the misconception that the church is a place rather than a people. He referenced a well-known children's hand game: "Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the doors and here are the people." While the game acknowledges that the people are inside, it subtly implies that the church is the building rather than the assembly of believers.

He further explained that this misunderstanding has shaped how churches function today. Many focus on maintaining buildings, fundraising, and providing entertainment-driven services rather than equipping believers to live out their faith in the world. As a result, church attendance has become more about passive participation than about fulfilling Christ's mission—a mission that is often likened to a spiritual battle. Martin explained, "And this is a mistake because the Church of God, people of God, need to be mustered for a battle, a spiritual battle... The *ecclesia* is a mustering of a military force, in one sense... I use the spiritual metaphor here, that we are fighting not against flesh and blood, but with spiritual weapons against spiritual enemies."

Martin reinforced this point by drawing attention to the early church. In the New Testament, believers met in homes and public places. There was no sacred building that housed the church because the church was the people. He emphasized that the shift toward building-focused worship has diminished

the biblical understanding of what it means to be part of Christ's body. He noted, "Once we see the church as a building, then it's a place to go to, and it's not really a church unless you're in the building, as opposed to the church being active most of the time outside the walls of the building. As they say, out of the salt shaker into the world, and we have to have that same emphasis."

Who Belongs to the Church?

Andrea then asked whether church membership is determined by human approval or by God's grace. Mark explained that in biblical terms, belonging to the church is based on covenant, not institutional approval.

He pointed to the Old Testament, where covenant membership was marked by circumcision and participation in the Passover. In the New Testament, baptism and the Lord's Supper serve similar roles. These sacraments signify inclusion in the covenant, but they do not require formal institutional approval.

Mark further noted that just as an infant in ancient Israel was circumcised as a sign of being under the covenant, baptism marks a person's inclusion in the New Testament church. This does not guarantee salvation, but it places them under the responsibilities of the faith.

Martin added that modern churches often impose additional requirements for membership, treating the church as an exclusive club. Some churches require extensive theological examinations before admitting members, while others establish bureaucratic hurdles that discourage participation. This model contrasts sharply with the New Testament, where believers were recognized as members of Christ's body based on faith and obedience rather than institutional processes.

Refueling or Reconstruction?

Andrea referenced a Chalcedon publication entitled *The Church as God's Armory* and asked how this perspective differs from the modern view of church as a place for spiritual "refueling." Mark highlighted the fact that as the congregation of the Lord, we are "here

to do the Lord's work, and that even the term *Lord* implies that there is a kingdom." He continued, "We're not just members of Christ, but we're members of Christ in the role as Lord of His Kingdom. Therefore, we have Kingdom duties... and we have a purpose, a role—the most obvious one is to obey the Lord and to make sure that His will is done and not our own."

No doubt, the modern tendency is to view the church as a place to receive encouragement before returning to normal life. Contrasted to this, Martin pointed out that in early American history, sermons would often last for hours because people understood the need to be thoroughly equipped in God's Word. Church was not about entertainment or convenience but about preparation for Kingdom work. Today, many churches have lost that focus, preferring short, non-confrontational messages that appeal to modern sensibilities rather than challenging believers to grow in their faith.

Reclaiming the Biblical Church

As the discussion concluded, Martin emphasized the need to return to a biblical understanding of the church. Jesus did not establish a passive institution but a governing body of believers empowered to advance His Kingdom. Mark highlighted the importance of the diversity of work found in the body of Christ, and Andrea noted that if Christians truly understood what it means to be the *ecclesia*, their approach to church would change dramatically. Instead of simply attending services, they would see themselves as an active part of God's work in the world.

By reclaiming this vision, the church can once again become the powerful force that Jesus described—one that the gates of hell will not prevail against. 🏰

Mark, Martin, and Andrea discussed much more about church councils, the role of elders, denominations, and R. J. Rushdoony's thoughts on the church. We encourage you to listen to this insightful and helpful discussion at our website, on YouTube, or on Spotify and iTunes. Links to all can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/ChalcedonPodcastEp54>

The Happy, Good, Blessed, and Fulfilling Work of Godly Dominion

Chalcedon Editorial

"A man, when free from the corruption of modern humanism, will work in terms of God's calling, and, under God, for his family, for his personal realization of his abilities, and more. These are essentially non-economic motives."¹

It's easy for the average Christian to be occupied with anything but the application of their faith to every area of life and rethinking all things in terms of God's revealed will in Scripture. Whether it's being consumed with the needs and expenses of the megachurch, absorbed in the political climate, or being hyperfocused on end times scenarios, believers are being taxed mentally, emotionally, and financially with very little left for the work of reconstruction.

Isn't the "work" of reconstruction itself a great burden? Obviously, God has called us to the work of dominion, so the question to answer is what sort of work are we doing for the Lord, and what are we allowing our minds to dwell on? Are we stressing ourselves over tasks and issues that are not the Lord's work?

Salvation's Earthly Purpose

God has promised a rest for the people of God, and each Sabbath represents a rest for us, but the great call to dominion is itself a restful mission:

The rest we gain in Jesus Christ is the rest of God after creating a world that was very good (Gen. 1:31). By our regeneration through Jesus Christ, we are now reestablished in our dominion mandate (Gen. 1:26-28), and we are commissioned to enter into God's rest by doing His will, and by bringing every area of life and thought into captivity to Jesus Christ and placing all things under the government of God's law-word.²

Therefore, we should be energized and enthusiastic regarding all that's involved in the work of reconstruction, and as we know, much of that work begins with ourselves, and the individual work we do and the potential we each possess. This was Rushdoony's point in

the citation featured below the title of this article. Salvation delivers us from the corruption of sin and humanism in any era—for us the modern era of humanism—but only to empower us to work in terms of God's calling and to realize our own abilities. We are not awaiting a rapture, nor are we absorbed within institutions or political parties. We are part of the body of Christ, but we are to be productive members in all that we do and all that we become.

Our Blessed Work

Not only is dominion a restful position for us, but it is also our greatest blessing from God as it pertains to this life. As Rushdoony notes, man's work was cursed under Adam, but in Christ, all that we put our hand to is blessed:

God, in giving the commandment to work and to exercise dominion, thereby blessed man. After the Fall, man's total life, thus including his work (Gen. 3:9-19), was placed under the curse, but the curse was not work but God's judgment on man in all his being and work. By blessing work and dominion, God pronounced it happy, good, and fulfilling for man. As we give ourselves to godly work, we place ourselves under God's blessing, whereas work apart from God moves under His curse.³

What's needed for today's Christian is simply a better understanding of all that's offered in the worldview of Christian Reconstruction. In other words, if we can provide the believer with new "glasses" through which to view themselves, history, their family, the church, the state, etc., then we'll help to unleash a new degree of energy and enthusiasm which can lead to greater advancements than any other

time since Rushdoony founded the Chalcedon Foundation. The world is more interconnected than ever before, and although there are detriments to the internet and social media, they still present far more opportunity than anything we've seen previously.

Let's Seize the Moment

The work of God is truly a blessing for all of us, and for Chalcedon, it's a joyous and happy experience to see the long way the ministry has come since 1965. As you know, we continue to publish new works by R. J. Rushdoony, but our existing catalog contains more than enough resources that untold masses still need to discover.

As you might expect, a message focused on Christian responsibility is not an easy sell, but times are rapidly changing though our message and mission never change. They are still the only solution to the times we face, but they are a message and mission that is becoming more palatable with each development in society and culture.

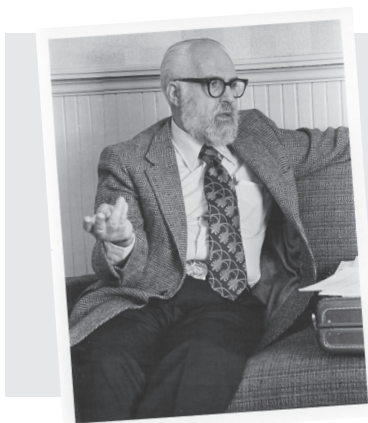
Christians are starting to see the failure of the Religious Right, end times thinking, and the church growth movements. Were it not for the political victory of Donald Trump, their hearts may have slumped facing a darker future.

We are not out of the weeds, but opportunities abound for Christians to seize the moment and discover the happy, good, blessed and fulfilling work of godly dominion. 🏡

1. R. J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology in Two Volumes* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1994), p. 1045.

2. R. J. Rushdoony, *Hebrews, James & Jude* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2001), p. 27.

3. *Systematic Theology*, p. 1045.



"Problems are thus not only aspects of a fallen world, as well as aspects of a growing world, but they are also opportunities sent from God, to test us, to enable us to grow, and to further us in the fulfillment of our calling."

~ R. J. Rushdoony

Problems by R. J. Rushdoony

A Word In Season: Daily Messages on the Faith for All of Life, Volume 1, pp. 138-139

"Problems, problems," a man remarked recently. "How I would like to be rid of them." At times, all of us have echoed this feeling. We struggle along, year after year, hoping that our problems will soon be over, but they do not disappear. They merely change.

The problems can be in our family, our neighborhood, our church, our country, or in ourselves. The problems can be a drought drying up our crops, or a flood, a killing frost, or a burning, scorching sun. "The good old days" sound good only because we have forgotten what the problems of those times were. Childhood, youth, middle age, and old age all have their problems, as does every era of history.

Problems are a part of life in a fallen world, and they are a necessary part of it, necessary to our testing and to our growth. Be sure of this: when you solve one problem, you create a new situation which has problems of its own. Problems are in part a product of sin and in part a condition of growth.

Before the Fall, no doubt Adam had decisions to make in Eden, as he farmed that paradise, and problems connected with developing and tending it. There was yet no curse, and hence no

perversity to the situation, but there were problems to be resolved.

We need to accept problems and testing as a condition of life. Even in Eden, apart from the problems of farming, Adam and Eve were every day put to the test. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil could be bypassed or not. God presented them always with the problem of faith and obedience.

Solve one problem, and you will have another. This is life, and to be sick of problems is to be sick of life. Because this is God's world, every problem has its answer, and with every answer we graduate to another problem, until we finally pass on into God's eternal Kingdom and our reward.

Problems are thus not only aspects of a fallen world, as well as aspects of a growing world, but they are also opportunities sent from God, to test us, to enable us to grow, and to further us in the fulfillment of our calling.

No man can avoid problems. The man who tries to avoid problems only creates greater ones. If we regard them as opportunities, we are the stronger for it. 🛠️

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Ways You Can Help Chalcedon

Engage with Our Content: Read and share our articles, podcasts, and videos with friends and family. It not only enriches your understanding of Christian Reconstruction but also helps spread these ideas to a wider audience.

Host Study Groups: Organize small groups in your community to discuss the principles of Christian Reconstruction. These gatherings can serve as a powerful tool for education and outreach, creating a local support network for our cause.

Donate Financially: Your financial support is vital for us to continue our work. Regular donations help us to plan and execute projects more effectively, including publishing new materials and maintaining our online presence. Consider setting up a recurring donation to provide steady support.

Pray for Our Work and Mission: Prayer is the foundation of everything we do. Please pray for Chalcedon, its leadership, and its mission to educate and apply the message of Christian Reconstruction. Your spiritual support is invaluable.

By taking these steps, you can make a significant difference in helping us achieve our goals and spread this message. Together, we can work towards a society that reflects the faith for all of life.

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