



TRANSCRIPT

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Do I Have to Go to Church to Be a Christian?

00:00:02 00:00:02 **Michael Horton:** Jesus did not die in a cross so that we could all get together and enjoy the same musical repertoire. He brought people from every tribe, kindred, tongue, nation, culture, gender, ethnicity, generation in order to be members together in his body. That's got to be awkward. It's going to be awkward but it only works if there's some identity deeper than our consumer preferences.

00:00:38 **Narrator:** Five centuries ago in taverns and public houses across Europe, the masses would gather for discussion and debate over the latest ideas sweeping the land. From one such meeting place, a small Cambridge inn called The White Horse, the Reformation came to the English-speaking world. Carrying on the tradition, welcome to the *White Horse Inn*.

00:01:05 **Michael Horton:** Hello and welcome to another edition of the *White Horse Inn*. Do I have to go to church to be a Christian? We're used to hearing the contrast between a personal relationship with Jesus versus going to church or joining a church. We are familiar with evangelistic presentations where that's actually set. I'm not inviting you to join a church, but to have personal relationship with Jesus. The thing that we need to think about here is about the role of the church in God's plan for creation, redemption and eternity. The Father chose each of us to be part of the church. That is Christ's bride and body. To be united to Christ is to be united to his church. First of all, the church is the heart of God's plan from before time. Secondly, Christ gave his life for his church. Thirdly, the Spirit unites us to Christ, the head, and therefore to his body. You can't be united to Christ without also being united to his visible church. Fourthly, Christ delivers himself to sinners now by the ministry of the church. We never leave that ministry until we die. And then finally, the church is the everlasting society of God, our forever family. The church never goes away. And so, do I have to go to church to be a Christian now? That's the question that we'll be taking up in this edition of the *White Horse Inn* with Whitney Gamble, who is Professor of Theology at Providence Christian College in Pasadena, California; John Bombaro, Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in San Diego; Kim Riddlebarger, Pastor of Christ Reformed Church in Anaheim, California and I'm Mike Horton, I teach at Westminster Seminary, California.

First of all, this is something that we probably hear more frequently today than even a generation ago. I think that even my independent evangelical family members in the past would have fallen out of their seats if somebody had even asked this question. It was just expected, of course, you belong to a church. Today, even have very sincere well-meaning and engaged Christians who don't believe that church membership is actually important. There are a lot of churches that don't even have church membership and a lot of people who say, "I don't have to go to church." My church is the golf course," or, "My church is just getting together with friends at Starbucks. I don't need to go to church." First of all, as we set the context for this, what do you think are some of the reasons? Am I exaggerating the situation? Maybe what are some of the reasons for this?

00:03:49 **Kim Riddlebarger:** Well, you're not exaggerating and it's probably worse than you mention. I am continually shocked by the number of people that I meet that are professing Christians that have no connection to a church. It's a huge problem. It's a gigantic problem.

00:04:01 **John Bombaro:** Two contributing factors. One is the way that Americans conceive of themselves. We are the sovereign voters,

00:04:11 **Michael Horton:** Consumers.

00:04:12 **John Bombaro:** That's exactly right, and the consumers. That would be one aspect. But the other is a philosophy called voluntarism where the human will is the highest power. Human choosing, which goes right back into consumerism. In other words, we've conceived of the church just like we would of the bowling league and that is, it's a voluntary association. There's voluntary membership for this voluntary society, rather than owning that. By virtue of one's baptism, you are by definition a member of the church. The real question is whether you're a faithful member of the church or not.

00:04:01 **Whitney Gamble:** When I think about a lot of the conversations I have with my evangelical friends, a lot of them are well-meaning, in that they love God, they want to serve him, they want to be faithful and they simply haven't been taught about what actually happens when we come together to worship, what actually happens when you become baptized, what actually happens. Some of them have even joined a church but on Sunday mornings they have other things that they have to do or they'll think, well, I'll just listen to a sermon later online or something.

00:05:13 **Michael Horton:** I met a pastor not that long ago who said in the middle of the conversation, he just mentioned in passing that he had never been baptized. You're a pastor of a church and you haven't been baptized. "Yeah. I'm beginning to see the importance of that." Good. There's this disconnect, it seems, that comes from a very strong tendency, as you mentioned, John, of individualism, consumerism, narcissism maybe even, where the church is sort of like a service provider that you are contracting with for certain services. So, people say, yeah, we left our church because it wasn't providing the kind of youth group that our kids were interested in or the worship wasn't real and you get down underneath that and basically what it meant was it didn't have a great praise band.

00:06:06 **Kim Riddlebarger:** I'm glad John raised the point about voluntarism because I think that really is a large part of it. This is thick in the American soul because when you go back to even the colonial period, the folks who came to America were separatists. They're already thinking, I don't like kings, I do not like bishops. So, there's something already in American -- the soul, the bloodstream, about anti-authoritarianism, that I'm not going to submit to anybody in authority in a church, period. No one is going to tell me what to believe. So, we start there. Then you get Ben Franklin, who sits in the church in Philadelphia and says it's just too doctrinal, it's too stuffy. I'm going to put my own religion and I'm going to practice it every Sunday morning at home. It's just thick in the American bloodstream. So, given that's our history, we should not be surprised that Americans these days just simply don't want any more time than want to believe and a pastor is going to tell me what I have to believe. Well, I'm not going then.

00:07:06 **Michael Horton:** Yeah. John Wayne, I like God until he gets under a roof.

00:07:09 **John Bombaro:** That's a major contributing factor and that is Christian narcissism. I have heard people say when we have discussions about the church that I am the church. I constitute the church. When that's the case, yeah, you can stay at home with your life application study Bible and do church yourself and become a self-feeder.

00:07:30 **Michael Horton:** That goes to the point, too, that when we're talking about reasons for this, cultural reasons for this especially, one thing that strikes me is how people talk about church also, not just as a service provider, but as an educational service provider or an inspirational service provider. George Barna, the church growth marketing guru, says that "before too long, people will stop going to churches altogether and realize that they are the church and that they can find even better resources online than they can find at their local church." Well, that assumes the reason a church is important is because we're basically brains on a stick waiting to download information. The incarnation tells us what God thinks of disembodied data downloads. Jesus is not a disincarnate data download from God, the Father. He is God incarnate and he gathered a similarly and flesh community around himself through a similarly material means called baptism and the Lord's Supper. So, God actually is tying us together as historical, living and fleshed beings around Jesus, the living incarnate one.

00:08:52 **Whitney Gamble:** I think that is so true and I think it goes back to our attitude in the States especially now. In a sense, there's a push on community so we learn from each other in community but then there's also a push against it where I may be in community with you but I don't have an authority figure that can actually tell me what's right or wrong.

00:09:10 **Michael Horton:** And I can leave anytime I want.

00:09:12 **Whitney Gamble:** Exactly. So, I can make my own community and then there's a lack of teaching about the importance of the church. This is an issue that definitely needs to be addressed.

00:09:20 **Kim Riddlebarger:** In most cases, the folks I encounter now are people who go to some mega church that's oftentimes Saturday night so they don't have to go on Sunday morning. The church is of sufficient size, 5,000 or more, that whether they go or don't go, it doesn't matter because no one notices they're there or not there. They're not accountable to anybody but themselves. As we all know, if you're not accountable at church, you're less likely to go because it's just easier to -- I have a busy day today. Kids have soccer, whatever. I'm not going to church. I'm not going. So, there's a lot of that and I think we've done a very poor job of communicating to people the importance not of church attendance, but of church membership.

00:09:57 **Michael Horton:** Let's go back now and sort of trace this in the history of redemption. Going back to the assembly of Israel, would Israelites have thought of themselves as individuals who have a personal relationship with Yahweh, apart from belonging to Israel?

00:10:15 **Kim Riddlebarger:** No. You just look at the Exodus. Israel has a distinct identity of self-awareness that they're the people of God, identifying themselves not as Egyptians, but identifying themselves as believers in Yahweh. And I think it starts with Christians realizing that we are the people of God and that means identifying with other people of God, that means identifying with a local church. I don't think people think in those categories. So redemptive history is replete with that.

00:10:40 **John Bombaro:** The pattern in the Old Testament is that we never find God making a covenant with an individual. It's always an individual who represents a people. Adam and all humanity, Noah and his sons, Abraham and his sons, Isaac and his sons, Jacob and his sons, David and his sons after him. The whole covenantal paradigm is at least familial and establishing something wider than that and that is a broader community. I think of when God calls Abraham and Abraham goes home. He's got 300 men under his household and he's like, "Guess what, boys, we're all Jews today." They're brought within the covenant because of that representation.

00:11:22 **Michael Horton:** So, God doesn't go from having a visible church in the Old Testament to having a platonic invisible church in the New Testament, right?

00:11:31 **Whitney Gamble:** That's so true. I think Old and New Testament, you couldn't access God unless you are part of the church. There's no one outside of God's people who had access to God. I mean, we see God bringing outsiders into Israel and into the New Testament church. But the only way to get to God is through his church.

00:11:53 **Michael Horton:** When we look at the Old Testament, too, I think of Jon Levenson, distinguished Professor of Jewish Studies at Harvard, who makes this argument that in the faith of Israel, it was always personal but never private. I love that distinction. It was always personal. Yes, a personal relationship. Every Israelite had a personal relationship with Yahweh but it was never private. It was always personal in as much as it was shared. It was communal. One of the points he makes is go back and look at the places, for example, where God instructs Moses what to say, what parents are to say to their children when they ask what does this Passover mean that we're doing. What they say is we were prisoners in Egypt and the Lord delivered us with a mighty hand and so forth. Levenson noticed that there. Two things. Number one, he says, notice, we were, not I was. I am a part of a group and notice, secondly, that it isn't first of all my experience that I then make public. It's, first of all, a public event that becomes personal; that first of all, it's something that happened objectively, factually in history to these people and secondarily, as a result of that, is something in which I participate.

00:13:19 **Kim Riddlebarger:** Very profound.

00:13:20 **Michael Horton:** So often, I think people come to church as individuals. Even when we are participating in the praise and the prayers and so forth, we're actually doing our private devotions in public. We're basically not participating in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We just happen to be doing this private spirituality with other people at the same time.

00:13:49 **John Bombaro:** It's amazing how we can get the theology of worship so wrong on this. When the lights are out on the congregation and they're thrown up on the stage into performers

up there, that's missing it. Closing our eyes and cutting ourselves off from other people is again antithetical to what New Testament is always talking about, and that is that the baptized individuals in relation to others. Think about the fruit of the spirit. The fruit of the spirit presupposes being in relations with others. They're never just for the self. It's all radical narcissism in the most perverse way if it's all self-referential. It's love in relation to the other, joy and peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control, all in relation to the other in the church.

00:14:34 **Michael Horton:** And don't you think a lot of this comes down to what people are used to when they "accepted Jesus into their heart"? It was all about not joining a church, but about their getting saved, an individual getting saved. Is that typically what we find in the Bible in terms of conversion?

00:14:53 **Kim Riddlebarger:** It's a foreign category to the New Testament to have somebody professing faith in Christ and not be a member of a local church. Evangelicals will throw this back all the time: "well we're not saved by joining a local church." No, but there's no place anywhere in the New Testament where someone who trusts in Christ is absent from the local church because when people come to faith in the New Testament, it's in the context of the church of so and so.

00:15:15 **Michael Horton:** And in Acts, it says, "And the Lord was adding daily to the church those who were being saved."

00:15:20 **Kim Riddlebarger:** That was a church in Jerusalem. And you have the language of Paul that God is forming a new society. He is going to turn the world upside down by taking the undesirables in the Greco-Roman world and making them his bride. You don't get that in today's church. You get, I'm going to follow this particular teacher because he's better. He tells better stories. The mega church is offering programs. The emphasis, I think, following in programs is a pretty good sign that mega churches are not converting non-Christians to the Christian faith. They're moving people from small neighboring churches that don't have those kinds of programs to the larger churches where they do.

00:15:57 **Michael Horton:** So, if people go to churches where basically it's data download, it's just information, it's just inspiration or it's just exhortation for another week, they can get all of that online. What they can't get online is the promises for you and your children, as many as the Lord our God calls to himself. The Lord was adding daily to the church those who were being saved. How? By proclaiming the gospel through a servant who is sent, not just by someone who sent himself, through baptism. What do they gather for in Acts? We're told they gathered regularly for the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers. And so, there is a regular orderly disciplined community in every local place; has pastors and elders and deacons. Paul even told Timothy that a church wasn't properly set up until it had elders. So there's an order to all of this. It's not a corporation like McDonald's, but it does take on institutional life just as analogous to the Word assuming flesh.

00:17:15 **Whitney Gamble:** It's so true. And I think what a lot of people miss is the idea of the connection to a family, where in the New Testament when you see one member becoming saved

and then his or her whole household then joins the church. They become part of the church as well and Christ isn't ashamed to call us his brothers. We're joined to Christ as our brother. That's a family imagery and so many people don't understand the implications of what that means. When you have family members, you can't ignore them. You can't just forget that they exist and that's what it is when you become a Christian. You are joined automatically to a larger family and a family that you're actually closer to these people who aren't blood family because of Christ.

00:17:59 **Michael Horton:** One emergent church leader says, "You ask one of our emergent churches what is it that brings us together", what is it that -- it's sort of our identity and he says it's not that we're a church or anything, it's that we're a group of friends. Isn't that in sharp contrast to what the scriptures say? This isn't the group of friends that I chose for myself. This is the family that God chose for me. I might have a different political perspective, belong to a different political party, disagree with them on all sorts of issues. I might watch a different news channel than they watch, I might have different tastes in music than they have, but Jesus did not die in a cross so that we could all get together and enjoy the same musical repertoire. He brought people from every tribe, kindred, tongue, nation, culture, gender, ethnicity, generation in order to be members together in his body. That's got to be awkward. It's going to be awkward. But it only works if there's some identity deeper than our consumer preferences.

00:19:15 **John Bombaro:** Disassociation with a church may also be related to a failure to properly understand our need for the gospel. That's to say, I've asked Jesus in my heart, I've gone forward, raised my hand saying Kumbaya Camp Hyawatha, I'm a Christian, I'm good to go now. No. If we understand the gospel, we understand that we constantly are in need of the gospel, that the gospel is that which changes and transforms and sanctifies us. The New Testament points to Christ as the true and proper priest of God, ministering the Holy Gospel in the church. And so, the holy ministry is the manifestation, the presence of Christ being with his people, saving and sanctifying them in the here and now. The place that we know we can find that is where the church gathers together for his word and sacraments. There we meet Christ. So it's just simply a question of, with respect to the gospel, do I need Christ continually? And if so, then you know where to go.

00:20:11 **Michael Horton:** There was a series of 'revivals' that spread across Christian colleges a number years ago and one of the reports that stood out to me was one person who said you knew that it was the Holy Spirit because there wasn't some man upfront. And so, basically what they were saying was the way you know it's the Holy Spirit is that there is no preaching, no baptism, no administration of the Lord's Supper, no discipline, no visible church or visible anything, no communion of saints. You know it's the Holy Spirit when it's just the Holy Spirit working directly and immediately in your heart. That is 180 degrees opposite to the scriptures, isn't it?

00:20:55 **Kim Riddlebarger:** It sure is. It gets back to the -- as you guys mentioned, the voluntarism that's so thick in American culture, that it's the act of my self-authentication, by what I do that matters, not being part of a larger body than myself. Our fundamental need is for God to take us out of ourselves and unite us to his family. And look at today, the attraction that evangelicals have towards segment and marketing, where you have churches of seekers. Well, the seekers are all going to look alike at the end of the day. They're going to be in the same socio-

economic bracket. They're going to invite people to this meeting, whatever it is, based on these reasons. And so, the people who come there have that reason in common, whereas the body of Christ, as you say, Mike, in the New Testament is multi-racial. It has rich people, it has poor people, it has old people, it has young people and it's so difficult to talk about those things in a culture that does every kind of segment, people in the targeted groups. We're really swimming upstream on that one.

00:21:54 **Michael Horton:** Yeah. Not only is individualism, I think, a problem and one of the things that keeps people away from – you know what I'm saying -- I need to join a church, I need to be a weekly part of the church. Besides individualism is this obsession with the kingdom as something set over against the church, just as we want to be individuals and so we don't go to church. We use the kingdom as an alternative to the church because we want to be doers. For some reason, the kingdom idea is packed with the notion that we are somehow completing the redeeming and reconciling work of Jesus Christ; whereas the church is a place where we go to receive something. This is not just Protestant, this is on the Catholic side, too. For example, mainstream Roman Catholic theologian such as Father Richard McBrien wrote a book *Do We Need the Church?* in which he writes, "The church is no longer to be conceived as the center of God's plan of salvation. Not all people are called to membership in the church, nor is such membership a sign of present salvation or a guarantee of future salvation. Salvation comes through participation in the kingdom of God, rather than through affiliation with the Christian church." He added, "All men are called to the kingdom because all men are called to live the gospel." And you get this over and over and over again, this emphasis on the kingdom of God as a vital, exciting movement that we're all a part of, doing, doing, doing, versus the church as a humdrum place where you go to get what you got last week.

00:23:43 **John Bombaro:** This is all very simple to me. Every kingdom has a king. Where is that king located? He is located in his word and sacraments. Luther said something like this, "Before the bread and baptism, the gospel is the soul and most noble token of the church. Since through the gospel alone, the church is conceived, formed, nourished, begotten, brought up, fed, clothed, adorned, strengthened, armed and preserved." In short, the whole life and essence of the church is in the word of God as Christ says. "Man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Why do we need to go to church? I mean, there could be three answers to this. One, I need to go to church because there is social compunction. I feel the pressure and I need to show up there. I don't want anyone think I've fallen off the wagon, that sort of thing. Two, the scripture says do not fail in the assembly of believers. Thirdly, I need to go because my savior will be there and my king will be speaking loving, forgiving, pardoning words to me and that's what brings me to the church, along with all those who recognize their need for this gospel.

00:24:49 **Whitney Gamble:** It's so true. And I think, Mike, the example you gave earlier about the Holy Spirit is present when there's no one up in front doing anything and I think that's so sad and the emphasis in the New Testament on the office of the elder, the pastor, the teachers, the men who have been entrusted with the word of God who then give it out to the congregation for the congregation to be able to hear the words of Christ through their pastor. And I think that is something that's been lost, where we can all be our own pastors basically.

00:25:27 **Michael Horton:** And then from our traditions at least, our Reformation traditions, we have no trouble saying that the 'man upfront' is the one who is delivering Christ to you in the form of human words, ordinary water, bread and wine. Also, even outside of the regular public ministry of the word and sacraments, to be cared for, disciplined. Good grief. If you don't have church membership, you don't have care. You don't have anybody looking out for you. That word discipline, boy, do we hate that word. Being a disciple then you don't like discipleship. It simply means that you're registered with the saints and are therefore looked after by shepherds. Look, if you don't like discipline, you don't like being a sheep. You don't like having a shepherd. But there again, Christ is exercising his great shepherdness through these undershepherds and that's why the writer to the Hebrews says, "Submit to those who have watch over your souls." I'm telling you, for a person to say, "I don't want that. That infringes on my individual liberty. I'm the master of my fate, the captain of my soul," is as stupid as saying, "I don't want the doctor to check me out. I don't want a checkup. Look, if I have cancer, I don't want to know about it." I'm astonished when I hear well-meaning evangelical brothers, sometimes pastors, in independent churches. In many cases, they don't have membership but some cases they do. They say, "Your connectional government, whatever it is, Presbyterian, episcopal, your connectional form of government is legalistic and hierarchical." Let me just say something about both of those.

Legalistic? If somebody brings an accusation against another person, that has to be brought to the elders, not gossiped about. If you gossip about that, you'll be talking to the elders. It protects the honor and good name of the people otherwise thrown under the bus by gossip. Secondly, if you are charged with something, it's not by a lynch mob, you have the opportunity to respond and if you think that that local church has abused its authority and has not given the right verdict, you can appeal that to the broader church and that can go all the way to the national level. There is redress. That doesn't happen when Pastor Bob, who just planted a church last year because he felt led to, has absolutely no accountability to anybody, has decided that he's going to passively aggressively discipline people who have offended him personally and you get that all the time. I guarantee you, people who say this is a legalistic and hierarchical way of going about things don't realize that if you don't have that, what you get are people who say we don't have churchianity in all this formalism and yet it ends up being more tyrannical than anything that would have checks and balances.

00:29:00 **Kim Riddlebarger:** Two things have to be said in response to that. One is folks who think that way need to wrestle with the data in the New Testament that tells them how to set up and organize their churches. They're not boards, they're not Pastor Bob, CEO. The New Testament is pretty clear that the church begins with the ordaining of elders who oversee those congregations and deacons serve the poor and needy. This isn't exactly absent from the New Testament. The New Testament is really clear about how churches are to be ordered and governed. Second of all, I go back to the folks who have grown up in the cavalry chapel system in Orange County who've struggled with the so-called Moses Model invented by Chuck Smith, that the pastor speaks directly to God and then anyone else who doesn't agree with the pastor is removed from leadership. This is created. Look at the website. It's devoted to people have been tyrannized by Pastor Bob who is hearing directly from the Holy Spirit what he's supposed to do and anybody dare challenge him, they are out. This is -- you think the Pope is bad --

00:30:02 **Michael Horton:** The Pope at least has more accountability.

00:30:04 **Kim Riddlebarger:** Yeah, he's got a college of cardinals he's got to speak to. This is tyranny.

00:30:08 **John Bombaro:** The commission doesn't extend any further than what Jesus had stated in John 20. "Whose ever sins you remit, they are remitted. Whose ever sins you did not remit, they are not remitted." That's the extent of it. Jesus says "he who hears you and this compacity hears me and he who hears me hears the one who sent me."

00:30:26 **Kim Riddlebarger:** There are three things that you're going to miss by not going to church. One is when you read the word, it isn't the same as someone in the official capacity proclaiming Christ to you from the scripture. So, we should go to church with the expectation that God is going to actually speak to us through the person who's reading the text.

00:30:42 **John Bombaro:** That's called primary speech. God addresses you specifically as opposed to secondary speech, which is more informational background.

00:30:49 **Kim Riddlebarger:** The second thing you'll miss out on is if you have a church with a decent liturgy, you're going to have your minister stand in the place of Christ and say to you, "Your sins are forgiven." I often quip the reason why evangelicals have so many counseling ministries is their theology makes people neurotic. You should go to reformation church and hear that you've had a really bad week, your heart is filled with sin and temptation and lust. Well, the good news is Christ has died for that. You are forgiven of that because you have trust in him. Ministers are equipped to say that and are called to say that. Calvin's point that the minister of gospel is supposed to be a minister of assurance of salvation.

00:31:25 **Michael Horton:** It is Christ, not the minister, who is dispensing salvation. He's just doing it through these creaturely means.

00:31:34 **Kim Riddlebarger:** The third thing you miss out on is the Lord's Supper. There is a sense in which when we hear the gospel preached, the natural culmination of that preached gospel is the visible word and word and sacrament. You can do your punch and cookies thing if you wish, but that's not a sacrament. The fourth thing you miss out on is communal prayer. There's something very powerful about the assembled saints gathering together to pray for Martha Smith's condition and she benefits from that and the church benefits from that.

00:32:03 **Michael Horton:** Sinclain Ferguson makes a great point on this, puts it in a great way. He says, "As reformation Christians, we don't believe that we pray to the saints, but we certainly do believe that we pray with the saints. When we're praying in that service, we're praying with Christ, not only through his mediation, but Christ is leading us in prayer and praise and gathering around himself not only those of us who are gathered there locally in that place, but in all places."

00:32:35 **John Bombaro:** With the angels and the archangels and all the company of heaven. May all magnify your glorious name.

00:32:40 **Michael Horton:** Yeah. This transforms worship. It really makes it something -- think about that when you're praying, that you are praying actually with the whole company of heaven.

00:32:49 **Whitney Gamble:** And to say then, "I can't go to church. I don't want to go to church because I'm too tired or whatever." It almost is ridiculous.

00:32:57 **Kim Riddlebarger:** If that's before you, it becomes ridiculous.

00:32:59 **John Bombaro:** So, Christ is present with his people and we go to church because we need to hear the real voice and experience the real presence of God if this is a relationship of love and commitment. I think about it in my relationship with Melinda, my wife. I could be a real knucklehead in this relationship and screw it up pretty bad. Well, I could go to a letter that Melinda wrote me 20 years ago that says how much she loves me and so and so forth and that would be true and such but it is much more existentially profound and needed for her to whisper in my ears today, "I forgive you. I love you." And that's exactly what the Lord does when we gather together where he's promised to be.

00:33:44 **Michael Horton:** It seems to me, too, that in the letter to the Hebrews, there is a direct connection between regular participation in the life of a local church and the problem of apostasy. Here, a couple of things that seem pretty evident in the epistle are people are dropping like flies. Partly, it seems because of persecution and so they were former Jews, they're going back to Judaism, it's easier to be a Jew in the Roman Empire than a Christian in the Roman Empire at this point. So they're going to go back to Judaism. There's a lot of people who haven't quite made that decision. They're kind of leaking out of the church. They're just not attending regularly and so the writer says, "Hey, don't give up the meeting together that is necessary." He also says, "Stop being infants. By now, you should be adults in your eating habits but you're like infants." You're like babies that are not even ready for solid food. You're like children without a parent around, seen around eating jelly beans all day instead of having a square meal. No wonder he has three warning passages in that letter saying that a lot of people are falling away. When you look at the statistics today of people who the majority of those growing up in evangelical churches being unchurched by their sophomore year in college, you look at these really staggering tragic surveys of what's happening, is it all that surprising? Do we really seriously think, not just from a biblical perspective, but what sociology is telling us, do we really believe that we can long sustain generations of belief without belonging?

00:35:41 **Kim Riddlebarger:** Well, the statistics make that point pretty clear that we are successfully unchurching the entire future generation and we're unchurching them that church doesn't matter. We're shrinking it more and more. It used to be the Lord's Day. Now, it's like the Lord's 45 minutes.

00:35:59 **John Bombaro:** If indeed -- because one of the issues that I find is that parents will have their children baptized but won't follow through with the rest of Christ's mandate and that is to have them catechized. So, we're constantly seeing this splash and dash as it were in having to follow up after squirrels who have gone out of the church.

00:36:19 **Michael Horton:** And I assume it's the same in Lutheran churches. In reformed churches, we say that the primary place where catechesis is to be done is in the home and the church is only supplementary. Well, you get this whole idea in the culture generally, that you drop your kids off at school and you drop them off at church. That's what they're going to get. I'm telling you, I mean, I think we all can say here that if that's your approach, if you imagine that your kids are going to get their religious formation for that hour every week, usually it's -- increasingly in our day, it's one service. If we think that they're just going to kind of get it from an hour once a week, seriously, that's just not going to happen.

00:37:12 **Whitney Gamble:** I think it's no surprise that college students aren't continuing to attend church. The kids need to be taught what's actually happening here. They need to be able to be grown into mature adults.

00:37:24 **Michael Horton:** And it's not just that they haven't been taught what the church means, they haven't experienced what the church is because they've gone from nursery to children's church, to youth group, to campus ministry, all of these para-church things, but they can't remember a Sunday where they actually say with the communion of saints in the 'big church' and participated in the ordinary means of grace.

00:37:54 **John Bombaro:** My expectations of your faith are low if you're not attending to word and sacrament. That's it. The Holy Spirit is going to fortify, foster, strengthen your faith, in and through the word and sacrament, to the degree in which I don't see you attending to such things is the degree in which my confidence in your faith and the possession of your faith is minimized.

00:38:16 **Kim Riddlebarger:** Agree wholeheartedly.

00:38:17 **Michael Horton:** And folks, as we wind up here, what John just said is not just his own personal opinion. That's based on the scriptures because God isn't just anywhere you want him to be. He's told you where to meet him. He's told you where he shows up. It's written down. It's public for everyone to see. Now, we're not saying that in the mystery of things, God might not show up somewhere else. We don't know. All we have is his promise of where he does show up. He swears he will be there. He will show up. Will we? Will we show up there? Because if we don't, we have absolutely no covenanted promises that he will show up in grace and mercy anywhere else. He will show up in wrath one day and we don't want to find him there. So, at the end of the day, becoming a member of a local church that truly preaches the gospel isn't a burden. It's one of the most important treasures that Christ has provided for his tender flock. And if you say you have a personal relationship with Jesus, then you have a personal relationship with his body. We're going to spend eternity together. Let's start living together now. We look forward to being with you again next time on the *White Horse Inn*.

00:39:36 **Narrator:** The *White Horse Inn* is a listener supported broadcast. For more information about this program, visit us online at whitehorseinn.org. If you sign up as an innkeeper, architect or reformer, not only will you get a complimentary subscription to our magazine *Modern Reformation*, but you'll also get longer editions of every *White Horse Inn* broadcast. To find out how to join one of these support programs, click on the support tab of our website, whitehorseinn.org.

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