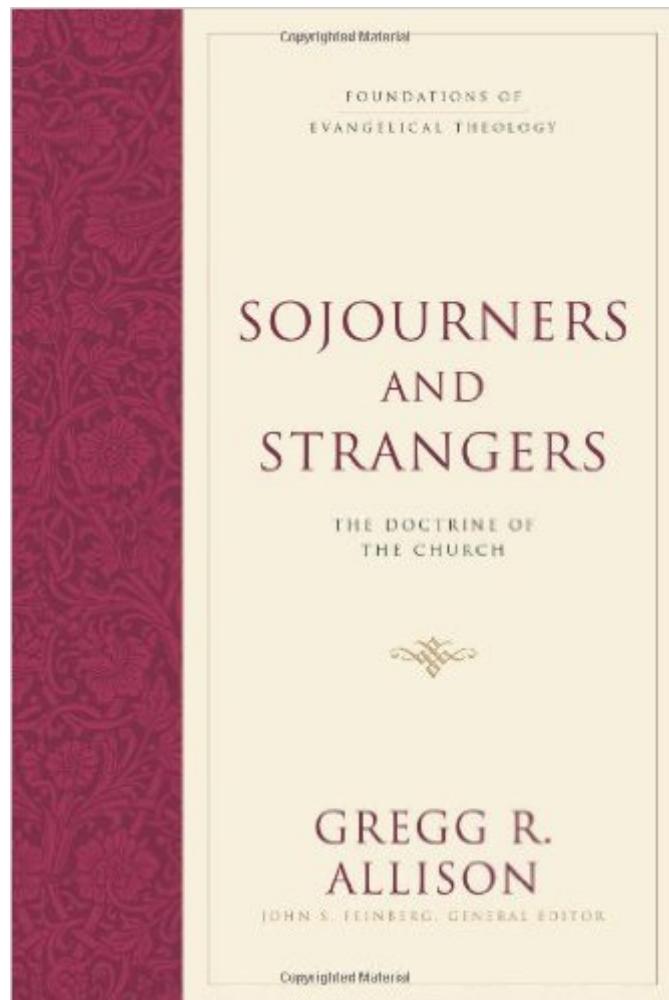


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# Sojourners And Strangers: The Doctrine Of The Church



## Synopsis

What is a church? This can be a difficult question to answer and Christians have offered a variety of perspectives. Gregg Allison explores and synthesizes all that Scripture affirms about the new covenant people of God, capturing a full picture of the biblical church. He covers the topics of the church's identity and characteristics; its growth through purity, unity, and discipline; its offices and leadership structures; its ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper; and its ministries. Here is a rich approach to ecclesiology consisting of sustained doctrinal reflection and wise, practical application.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Dr. Gregg Allison leaves no stone unturned in his newest work, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*. Allison's fine piece of work is the latest installment in the Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series, edited by John Feinberg. Six major themes form the skeletal structure of *Sojourners and Strangers*. Part One: Foundational Issues Allison introduces the subject of ecclesiology and underscores his presuppositions at the outset: "I firmly maintain that the source - the sole source - and the starting point of our theology is Scripture, the Word of God. He presents the basic idea of the church, which is "the people of God ... the communion of the saints ... and is composed of particular people: 'sojourners and strangers.'" The author presents his methodology for ecclesiology. Realizing that one's approach in this area has broad implications, Allison contrasts theological methods that embrace continuity and discontinuity between the testaments. He stands somewhere in the middle of this debate by describing himself as one who embraces a moderate

discontinuity, what some have described as progressive dispensationalism. His conviction has a bearing on his view that concerns the origin of the church and the relationship between the church, Israel, and the ordinance of baptism. This hermeneutical criteria is a helpful backdrop that serves the rest of the book well.

**Part Two: The Biblical Vision - Characteristics of the Church**

Here the author studies the inception of the church and her relationship to Israel and the kingdom of God.

The intention of the Foundations of Evangelical Theology series is "to address all areas of evangelical theology with a special emphasis on key issues in each area" and "to incorporate insights from Scripture, historical theology, philosophy, etc., in order to produce an up-to-date work in systematic theology." (17) Most of the writers are thoroughly evangelical in their theology and from a broadly Reformed perspective. The series aims to be "understandable to the beginner in theology as well as to the academic theologian," so the authors take care "to define whatever technical terms they use." (17) With that in mind, Gregg Allison is offering a textbook on ecclesiology which is evangelical and broadly Reformed. Allison teaches at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, so it's a Reformed baptist perspective. He is an elder at Sojourn Community Church, and if you're familiar with that church/church planting network, that means this is an ecclesiology from a Reformed Baptist perspective that is in favor of multi-site churches (which he provides a defense for at the end of chapter 9). The book itself is split into 7 parts: Foundational Issues, The Biblical Vision - Characteristics of The Church, The Vision Actualized - The Growth of The Church, The Government of The Church, The Ordinances of The Church, The Ministries of The Church, Conclusion. The opening two chapters cover first, a general introduction to the study of the doctrine of the church, and second the basis of the church in the new covenant. Allison explains his method, and makes a good case that this is an important doctrine.

Gifted theologians offer much guidance in areas like biblical theology, Christology and ethics, but resources that set forth ecclesiology are rarer, particularly from a robust Baptist perspective. Gregg R. Allison, professor of Christian theology at Southern Seminary, fills that void with his latest book, *Sojourners and Strangers*. "The church is the people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and have been incorporated into his body through baptism with the Holy Spirit," he writes. Though written for a wider evangelical audience, Allison maintains a firm commitment to Baptist ecclesiology in regard to the ordinances and church polity. Observing that church experience often influences the development of ecclesiology, he examines the sufficiency of Scripture in forming this doctrine and offers helpful tips for distinguishing between normative and

relative passages of instruction in the New Testament."The church of Jesus Christ itself is a necessary reality," Allison writes. Emphasizing the role of the church in Christian life, he describes seven characteristics of the church's origin and vision: doxological, logocentric, pneumodynamic, covenantal, confessional, missional and eschatological. Implementing these seven characteristics is the mark of pure churches, and Allison affirms the reality of false churches and the need for evaluating pure churches. Allison identifies a lack of church discipline as the greatest problem in American evangelical churches and a hindrance to achieving purity. Allison urges churches to practice discipline as a future warning and reminds them of the presence of Christ through this difficult process.

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