

Small Group Guide

"One Holy Church" | What's a Christian Anyway? Part 6

BEFORE YOU MEET

Encourage group members to reflect on their personal history with the church before gathering. Ask them to come prepared to share one positive and one difficult experience they have had as part of a church community.

OPENING (5-10 minutes)

Begin with this question to get the conversation started:

When you hear the phrase "the church," what is the first image or feeling that comes to mind? Where do you think that response comes from?

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE SERMON

Use these points to ground your discussion in the sermon's main ideas.

1. The Church Is One: The unity of the church is not an aspiration we are working toward -- it is a declaration that has already been made. Just as a marriage ceremony declares two people to be one, the church is called to spend its life becoming what it has already been declared to be in Christ. Unity is not built on shared preferences or uniformity. It is rooted in the one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God described in Ephesians 4.
 2. The Church Is Holy: Holiness does not mean perfection. It means being set apart as belonging to God. The Corinthian church is a powerful example: Paul addresses them as those who have been made holy, and in the very same letter confronts their divisions, immorality, and pride. Holiness is not something we manufacture. It is imputed to us by God and worked out in us over time as we return again and again to the foot of the cross.
 3. The Church Belongs to God: The church is not a human institution that we invented and can walk away from without consequence. It is the body of Christ and the bride of Christ. When we say "I love Jesus but I cannot stand the church," we may be expressing frustration with a specific community rather than a settled rejection of the body of Christ as a whole. The global church is growing rapidly, and God is at work in it -- even when our local experience feels discouraging.
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Work through as many of these as time allows. Do not feel pressure to cover every question.

On Unity

1. Pastor Samuel described the unity of the church as a declaration rather than a goal -- something we already are in Christ, not something we are trying to become. How does that reframe the way you think about pursuing unity in your relationships at church?
2. He noted that social media algorithms tend to present us with the worst possible version of those we disagree with, and that our perception of others is often far more extreme than reality. Where have you seen this play out in conversations about the church or about other Christians?
3. Paul and Barnabas disagreed sharply. Peter had to be corrected. The early church wrestled with difficult theological and cultural questions, yet remained committed to Jesus. What is the difference between a division that breaks fellowship and a disagreement that can be held within fellowship? How do you know which is which?
4. Pastor Samuel said, "Our unity is not merely for our comfort. It is part of our witness." What would it look like for your small group specifically to be a witness to the watching world through the way you treat one another?

On Holiness

5. Many people hear the word "holy" and immediately think "perfect." How does understanding holiness as being set apart for God rather than being flawless change the way you relate to your own sin and failure?
6. Pastor Samuel described a holy church as one marked by love instead of hatred, truth instead of deception, generosity instead of selfishness, forgiveness instead of bitterness, justice instead of oppression, and compassion instead of indifference. Which of these marks feels most present in your life right now? Which feels most absent?
7. He said, "Holiness is not withdrawing from the world. It is living differently within the world." Where in your everyday life -- your workplace, your neighborhood, your family -- is God calling you to live differently?

On Belonging to God

8. Pastor Samuel spoke from personal experience about a time when a pastor's moral failure deeply fractured his trust in the institutional church. Have you experienced something similar? How did you process it, and where are you now in that journey?
9. He challenged the phrase "I love Jesus but I cannot stand the church" by suggesting that the Holy Spirit may be nudging us not away from the church, but away from a specific community. How do you respond to that distinction? Is it helpful or does it feel too simple?
10. The sermon closed with this question: "The question is not whether the church is one and holy. The question is whether we will live as one and holy people." What is one concrete way you could more fully live into that calling this week?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Choose one or two of these as a group to commit to between now and your next meeting.

- Practice humility in a specific relationship. Identify one person in your church community with whom you have tension or distance. Commit to one small act of humility toward that person this week -- a conversation, a kind word, or simply choosing not to speak negatively about them.
- Reframe how you talk about the church. Pay attention this week to whether you speak about the church using "they" and "them" or "we" and "us." When you catch yourself using distancing language, pause and ask what it would mean to own that reality as your own.
- Pray for the global church. Redwood prays for other churches every Sunday. This week, set aside time to pray specifically for the church in Africa, Asia, or Latin America -- regions where Christianity is growing rapidly. Ask God to expand your vision of what the body of Christ actually looks like.
- Examine your contribution. Pastor Samuel closed by asking, "How have I contributed to the way the church is?" Spend time in honest reflection or journaling this week on that question. Bring what you discover back to God in confession and ask for grace to live differently.
- Reach out to someone who has walked away. If you know someone who has stepped back from church life, consider reaching out simply to listen -- not to argue or persuade, but to understand their experience and let them know they are not forgotten.

CLOSING PRAYER

Close your time together by praying the themes of the sermon back to God. You may use this as a guide or pray in your own words:

Lord, we confess that we have sometimes spoken of the church as though it were someone else's problem. Forgive us for the ways we have contributed to division and brokenness. Remind us that we are one body, one spirit, one people -- not because we have earned it, but because you declared it. Help us to pursue holiness not as a performance, but as a response to your grace. Give us the courage to stay, to love, and to become the church you have called us to be. Amen.