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### What Is The Church?



## | The Church – It’s Nature

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The word ‘church’ in the bible never describes a building, a meeting, or an organisation – only people. But exactly what kind of people? We cannot fulfil our destiny unless we know who and what we are! The church is often paralysed by an inadequate view of her nature and mission. We urgently need a higher view of ourselves, to deliver us from mediocrity, compromise, smallness, divisiveness and impotence.

As we realise how greatly God sees His people we discover that the church is “an awesome place...none other than the House of God, the very Gateway to Heaven!” [Ge 28:17]. We are unique; hand-picked people at the forefront of God’s cosmic plan and purpose, manifesting His presence and glory, extending His Kingdom, bringing heaven to earth, and preparing the world for the return of Jesus! And, if we’re convinced of this, it will affect absolutely everything about us...

In this session we look at fundamental aspects of our nature, introducing several key themes that will be developed further in later sessions.

# 1 Revelation People

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## 1.1 On This Rock...

Jesus's own 'first mention' of the "church" [Mt 16:15-19] reveals fundamental aspects of both our nature and mission:

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

**Mt 16:15-19**

Here we see:

1. The church is built on the 'rock' of revelation that He is Christ
2. This revelation comes only from God
3. Jesus Himself will build the church
4. The church belongs to Him
5. The gates of Hades will not overcome the church
6. The church has the keys of the kingdom of heaven
7. The church has unlimited power to bind and loose.

Firstly, then, the church is people who've received a revelation from God and responded by confessing "Jesus is the Christ". This is basic: the church comprises only those who've been born again; and rebirth is only possible as a result of a heaven-inspired revelation enabling us to answer Jesus' question "Who do you say I am?" The revelation needed is that Jesus is "the Christ": the Anointed One; the fulfilment of all of God's promises. It's a revelation about Him - but always results in a greater understanding of who we are [Mt 16:18]; salvation involves a total re-orientation of our lives as we are re-born and re-named.

Jesus is building His church as His Father reveals Him to the world. The pattern is clearly seen at Pentecost [Ac 2:36-41]: first there is revelation ("God has made this Jesus...Lord and Christ"), and then a response ("what shall we do?"), enabling



Peter to use the “keys of the kingdom” to open heaven’s gate, and call multitudes out of the world and into God’s Kingdom, via a divinely-prescribed way [Ac 2:38]:

1. Repentance – saves us from dead works
2. Baptism – saves us from the power of the past
3. Filled with Spirit – saves us from impotence and self-effort
4. Added to church– saves us from individualism and isolation

## 1.2 Born From Above

The initiative for salvation and for building His church is therefore always with God! The revelation comes by the Spirit: “no-one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again (born from above)” [Jn 3:3,7 margin], or “born of the Spirit” [Jn 3:5,8]. The church is “seated with Christ in heavenly realms” [Eph 2:6]; she is not a human organization but a heavenly creation; supernatural people, born from above by the Spirit as a result of a revelation from God.

Revelation is the foundation of the church; we are by nature a people of revelation. “We saw Him with our own eyes and touched Him with our own hands. He is the Word of Life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen Him...we proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard...” [1Jn 1:1-3, NLT]

Every member of the church has the capacity to receive and respond to revelation. The implications of this are breathtaking and the potential unlimited: we can all see and hear God! We can all respond to Him! We all have a ‘live-link’ with heaven: when the church is gathered, anything is possible!...



## 2 Called People

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### 2.1 Called Out

We are by definition a called-out people. ‘Church’ is a translation of the Greek *ekklesia* [derived from “ek” [out] and “kaleo” [to call] used as far back as the 5th century BC to describe the calling, summoning or assembly of the army together. It’s the assembly of those who have been called out and there is an inherent sense of being called for a particular purpose or activity. In its NT usage, the call-out is not the just from other activities or responsibilities, but is far more radical:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

**1Pe 2:9**

The church is those called out of sin and “called...into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ” [1Co 1:9]; people living a transformed life in Christ. We cannot be part of the church without being called out of what we were in. The very hallmark of the church is this radical event of conversion and salvation (our response to revelation). Without salvation “the word church is evacuated of all meaning”.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.2 Called To Follow

The call out of the world is a call to ‘follow Christ’. The initiative in salvation is God’s; Jesus has called us out. “Follow me!” was Jesus’s profoundly simple call to the early disciples [Mt 4:19, 4:21-22, 9:9]. For some the cost is too great [Mt 8:22, 19:21] as it is a call away from other priorities or riches and to daily death at the cross [Mt 10:38, 16:24]. But to those who respond to the revelation that Jesus is to be followed, it is a call to discipleship and disciple-making [Mt 28:19]. We are called to follow Christ and become His disciples.

Jesus “called” the Twelve “that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach” [Mk 3:13-14]. Later, he “called” them and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and heal the sick [Mt 10:1]. The church is a called people and is fundamentally ‘apostolic’ in its foundations [Eph 2:20] and nature. As such, we are to be with Jesus and to be sent out by Him and with His authority. As the early church embarked on their outward mission, they were distinguishable as those “who had been with Jesus” [Ac 4:13].

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<sup>1</sup> J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology Vol. 3: The Church, the Kingdom and Last Things* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1992), 18.



## 2.3 Called Together

An important sense of ekklesia is the assembling together of those called out from their old lives and activities. Thus in the Greek world ekklesia was used to describe those assembled specifically for civic or political purposes (as used 3 times in [Acts 19:32-41](#)), e.g. being ‘called out’ of the city to vote.

In the Septuagint (“LXX”),<sup>2</sup> ekklesia was used to represent qahal which means to gather or to summon to an assembly, or the act of assembling. It describes those who have heard and responded to the call to assemble. Church is “the assembly of the called”.<sup>3</sup>

How does the church assemble or gather? Three expressions of the gathered church are identified in the NT:

How does the church assemble or gather? Three expressions of the gathered church are identified in the NT:

1. The church in a region or area [Ac 9:31, 1Co 16:19<sup>4</sup>, 2Co 1:1].
2. The church in a city or town [2Co 1:1, Ac 11:22].
3. The church in a home [Ro 16:5; 1Co 16:19, Col 4:15].

The church is the gathered community of believers, whether expressed in a home, a city, or a region. No distinction of terms is made; “the NT writers believed that to be part of the church in one aspect was to be part of the church in all aspects.”<sup>5</sup> These three geographical distinctions are the only NT designations of the church; every NT church is designated by a geographical name, simply describing the area to which it communicated. Denominational or sectarian names and designations are unbiblical and divisive.

There is also really no such thing as a local church because the house-, city- or regional-expression is integrally and fundamentally both part of the greater thing and (crucially) the same in its nature and purpose. And it is not merely a part or fragment of the universal church (in the sense of being inferior); it is the total church in an individual expression. A better description would be ‘the church localised’ for it is simply the universal church visibly expressed in a particular location. “Nothing in the thought of God is local, departmental, separate or independent. In the thought of God everything to do with His church is universal, relative, interdependent; the church is one...”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The Greek translation of the Hebrew OT scriptures, in common use amongst Greek-speaking Christians in the NT period.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 16.

<sup>4</sup> Here (cf. 2Co 1:1) a multiple use of the word ‘church’ is made, describing more than one expression. But in each case the word is the same; there are not two (or more) words.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Colson, *The Body*, Word, 1992, 54.

<sup>6</sup> Austin T Sparks *The Church which is His Body*, Vol 1, 39.



The church is one throughout the whole world and yet - at the same time - fully present in every individual assembly or local community of believers, for wherever we gather in His name Jesus is there.

Moreover, the church is not diminished in any way when its members are not physically together. Ekklesia is used in the NT to identify God's people both in their scattered and gathered condition; we are the church all the time!

## 2.4 Called To Be Holy

The called-out, called-together followers of Christ are “called to be holy” [1Co 1:2]; “God...has saved us and called us to a holy life” [2Ti 1:9]. We are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...” [1Pe 2:9]. What makes us holy?

1. We are a called-out people; radically ‘separated’ from the world (the basic meaning of ‘holy’). The OT separation of God’s people was mainly physical <sup>7</sup> but in the NT the separation is primarily spiritual; we are in the world but not of the world [Jn 15:19, 17:14, 18:36].
2. We are “in Christ” and have become partakers in His holiness [1Co 1:30]; He has made us holy [Eph 5:25-26] and only in His Body will the full holiness of the Head be seen.
3. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit [Eph 2:22, 1Co 3:16-17]; He has chosen to make us His dwelling place.

As God’s called people it is our privilege, responsibility and our very nature to be holy and thus to “live a life worthy of the calling” we have received [Eph 4:1]. As new creations, it is now more inevitable that we live righteously than it was that we used to sin: “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.” [1Jn 3:9, cf 5:18].

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<sup>7</sup> By geography and culture, and emphasised by laws which demanded physical cleanliness and holiness.



## 3 God's People

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### 3.1 The People Of God

The church is God's very own people, a people "belonging to God" [1Pe 2:9]. The idea of God having a people for Himself is a dominant theme throughout the Scriptures, characterised by the recurring declaration "I will be your God...you will be my people"<sup>8</sup>. God first speaks of a people belonging to him ("my people") in Exodus 3:7 where He expresses concerns for their wellbeing and His plans to set them free; later [Ex 6:1-8] this plan of deliverance is revealed and God declares what He will do for His people:

- destroy Pharaoh's grip on them [6:1]
- deliver them as a covenantal act [6:5]
- free them from oppression and slavery [6:6]
- redeem them powerfully [6:6]
- take them as His own people [6:7]
- give them a destiny, an inheritance and a possession [6:8]

Here are hallmarks of God's people: they've had Satan's grip on their lives destroyed, been delivered and freed from slavery, and received a destiny, an inheritance and a possession. God is not just saving people and preparing them for heaven - He is creating a people among whom He can live and display His glory! There are fundamentally 'corporate' dimensions to our calling.

### 3.2 Christ's People

Specifically, we are Christ's people. The church belongs to Jesus, who simply said: "I will build my church" [Mt 16:18].

Setting out his most complete ecclesiology in Ephesians, Paul uses several metaphors to explain the nature of the church: Body, Building (temple), Brotherhood (family), Bride (wife), and Battalion (army). Each picture reveals Christ's ownership of His church, as their unique relationship and joining:

- He is the Head of the Body [Eph 5:23], which depends on Him for life and direction.
- He is the Cornerstone [Eph 2:20] and Capstone [Mt 21:42] of the Temple, and every living stone is built around Him [1Pe 2:5].
- He is the Father of the Family/Household [Eph 2:19, 3:15], with many sons and daughters.

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<sup>8</sup> See Ex 6:7, Lev 26:12, Jer 7:23, 11:4, 24:7, 30:22, 31:33, 32:38, 36:28, Ez 11:20, 14:11, 34:30, 37:23, 37:27, Zech 8:8



- He is the Bridegroom [Mk 2:18-20, Mt 9:15, Lk 5:34] and Husband [Eph 5:25] of the Bride.
- He is the Commander of the Army [Isa 55:4, Josh 5:14-15].

In every sense, the church belongs to Jesus; she has been “bought with His own blood” [Ac 20:28]. But the church’s relationship with Christ goes even further than this: not only is she owned by Him and joined with Him, she is also one with Him. As Eve was to Adam, so the church is ‘bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh’. As Christ is the fullness of God [Col 2:9] so we are “his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way”! [Eph 1:22-23]. The church is the fullness of Christ; containing and displaying every aspect of His nature and mission!...

### 3.2 God’s Covenant People

God’s eternal longing is a people for Himself, who will fill the earth and exercise His dominion. His purpose was spoken in creation [“let us make man in our image”, Ge 1:26] and in His first words to mankind [“be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it, rule over...”, Ge 1:28]. It’s a purpose being outworked through covenant <sup>9</sup>:

- The first covenant with **Adam** [Ge 2:9, 15-17, Hos 6:7] provided the context for his commission to fill and rule the earth, and was renewed with Noah [Ge 9:8-17, 9:1].
- God made a covenant with **Abraham** [Ge 15:1-18, 17:2-16] promising to bless him, make him fruitful and bring many nations from him [Ge 12:2-3, 17:67].
- As His people grew from a family into a nation, God made covenants with **Moses** (expressing His longing for a ‘model society’, Ex 24:6-8) and **David** (promising a descendant forever on his throne, 2Sam 7:8-16, Ps 89:3-4).
- But God’s purpose was always to embrace all nations, <sup>10</sup> and the prophetic promise was of a “new (and better) covenant” [Jer 31:31-34, Ez 36:26-27, Heb 7:22]. Established in His “blood...poured out for many” [Mt 26:28], all who are born again now participate in this new covenant.
- God’s longing is fulfilled in the church: a people He can call his own; a community set apart and enjoying covenantal fruitfulness and blessing. In the church, the recurring theme of every covenant is finally realised: “I will be your God...you will be my people...I will live among you” [Lev 26:11-12, Ez 37:27, Rev 21:3]

<sup>9</sup> “Our highest understanding of covenant is that it is a bond which God has established to join His people to Himself, and to join His people together”, Charles Simpson, *The Covenant and the Kingdom*, Sovereign World, 1995, 44.

<sup>10</sup> It was always God’s intention to save the Gentiles and add them into His people: Jonah was sent to rescue Nineveh; Egypt was called “my people” [Isa 19:25] and God promised “salvation to the ends of the earth” [Isa 49:6].



### 3.3 The Israel Of God

The church is therefore in direct line with the OT people of God. The NT doesn't speak of a 'new Israel' or a 'new people of God'; but simply of "the Israel of God" [Ga 6:16] – an Israel in continuation with the past but now comprised of both Jew and Gentile as the one people of God.

God covenanted to bless all nations through Abraham and his descendants [Ge 18:18]. John the Baptist and Jesus first defined the true 'sons of Abraham' [Mt 3:9, Jn 8:39] and Paul makes clear that whilst not all Jews are Israel [Ro 9:6], all (Jew and Gentile) who believe and put their faith in Christ are "children of Abraham" [Gal 3:7-9], "Abraham's seed and heirs" [29]. Believing Jews are the (cultivated) olive tree [Ro 11:24] and believing Gentiles are now grafted-in [Ro 11:17].

Paul is therefore able to write to the Gentile church at Corinth and speak to them of "our forefathers" who came out of Egypt [1Co 10:1-2]. Similarly, he takes promises made to OT Israel and applies them directly to the church:

For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

2Co 6:16, quoting Lev 26:12, Jer 32:38, Ezek 37:27

Likewise, Peter's declaration that the church is "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" [1Pe 2:9] is a direct echo of God's statement to OT Israel in Ex 19:5-6.

"The first Christians did not regard themselves as a new society but as the ancient people of God, that is, as that portion of the church of the patriarchs and prophets which had not, by rejecting the Messiah, forfeited its birthright and cut itself off from the promises of Israel..."<sup>11</sup>

The church is God's eternal plan; she is not a 'replacement' of Israel but the fulfilment. God's "purpose was to create in Himself one new man" [Eph 2:15] (a 'brand new type of humanity'); in Christ new humanity has been born: the church!

### 3.4 One People

Finally, God has only one people: Jesus is building His church, (not many). The Head has only one body [Eph 4:4]; the Bridegroom only one bride [Eph 5:25]; and the Shepherd only one flock [Jn 10:16]. The church is universal (all God's people in all places at all times, "the inclusive, worldwide, corporate reality of the multitude of men and women who, throughout history, have been reconciled to

<sup>11</sup> Hillman Streeter, *The Primitive Church*, MacMillan & Co., 1929, 47.



God through Christ Jesus.”<sup>12</sup> and transcendent (those now living in the immediate presence of God, cf. **Heb 12:22-23**).

There is an inherent unity of the church. We make every effort to maintain this unity [**Eph 4:1**], but we cannot (nor need not) try and create it - for it already exists.

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<sup>12</sup> Howard A Snyder, *The Community of the King*, IVP, 1977, 58.



## | 4 Distinguished People

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More than anything else, God’s personal presence is the distinguishing characteristic of His people. He has chosen to live and dwell in His church! We are to be distinguished not by rules, regulations or rituals – but BY HIS PRESENCE!

The ‘presence of God’ is a dominant theme throughout the Bible: in the beginning, God was present in the Garden [Ge 3:8]; and at the end He will be present in the City [Rev 21:3]. Understanding the development of this theme will help us grasp the significance of being God’s distinguished, Spirit-indwelt people.

### 4.1 God’s Presence In The Old Testament

In the OT, God’s presence was seen primarily in the tabernacle and the temple:

- God first appeared to Moses at Mount Sinai [“the place where you are standing is holy ground”, Ex 3:5], assured him of His personal presence [“I will be with you”, Ex 3:12] and instructed him to bring Israel out of Egypt to worship Him there. When they arrived God promised “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud” [Ex 19:9], and after consecrating the people and forbidding them from even touching the mountain, Moses “led the people out of the camp to meet with God” [19:17] before himself ascending the hill and entering the cloud.
- Expressing His desire to dwell with His people, God gave instructions for the Tabernacle [“have them make a sanctuary for me and I will dwell among them”, Ex 25:8]. But God’s judgment on their idolatry [Ex 32], was to announce that He would not presence Himself with them after all [Ex 33:2-3], causing Moses to plead with Him to “distinguish them” with His Presence [Ex 33:15-16]. God relented, and when the construction was finished “the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” [Ex 40:35].
- Throughout their wilderness wanderings, Israel was led by cloud and fire [Ex 40:38] on their way to Canaan and to “the place the Lord will choose as a dwelling for His name” [Dt 12:10-11]
- Solomon’s temple was the fulfilment of the Dt 12:11 promise; and at its completion “the glory of the LORD filled his temple” [1Ki 8:11]. Although Israel understood no man-made sanctuary could ever contain the Almighty [2Ch 6:18, Ps 139:7-12], nevertheless the temple became the primary symbol of His presence among them.
- However, Israel’s continuing sin caused them to forfeit God’s presence: the people were exiled, the temple was destroyed, and “the glory of the Lord departed from over the threshold of the Temple” [Ez 10:18]. They were no longer a people distinguished by God’s presence.

- When the returning exiles rebuilt Solomon's temple they mourned it was nothing like the original [Ezra 3:12, Hag 2:3]. But God spoke of a greater plan, and promised the return of His presence ("my dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God and they will be my people", Ez 37:27) and a more glorious temple [Hag 2:6]. Ezekiel saw a new temple [Ez 40-48] and both Isaiah and Micah foresaw that "all nations will stream to it" [Isa 2:2-3, Mic 4:1-2].

The hope of God's renewed presence was therefore linked directly with the expectation of a restored temple to which Gentiles would also be welcomed. The OT ends with Malachi declaring that "suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple" [Mal 3:1].

## 4.2 God's Presence In The New Testament

Whilst the OT contained awesome shadows ('tasters') of God's Presence, something more glorious was coming!..

1. Firstly, Jesus came as the very Presence of God: "Immanuel...God with us" [Mt 1:23]. The Word became flesh "and made his dwelling (lit: tabernacled) among us" [Jn 1:14]. Now the God who was once untouchable [Ex 19:12] could be "touched with our own hands" [1Jn 1:1]
2. Secondly, Jesus declared Himself to be "greater than the temple" [Mt 12:6] which would be destroyed [Mk 13:1-2], for He was Himself the 'capstone' or 'cornerstone' of a new temple [Mt 21:42, quoting Ps 118:22-23].

The sending of the Spirit at Pentecost fulfilled God's promise to be with His people forever! [Jn 14:16]. The baptism in the Spirit was the ultimate act of Christ's first coming<sup>15</sup>: everything else (His life, death, resurrection and ascension) was building towards this final glorious act by which He filled the newly-redeemed church with His own dynamic life and power! "Suddenly" the Lord had come to His temple [Ac 2:1 cf Mal 3:1]. **A 'new temple' was created – the world's first Spirit-filled church!** The outpouring of the Spirit was a 'total immersion' into God's Presence, and is the distinguishing hallmark of God's people.

On the day the Law was introduced 3000 died [Ex 32]; but on the day the Spirit was poured out 3000 were saved and added to the church [Ac 2:41] – the glory of the latter house is far greater!..

## 4.3 The Temple Of The Living God

The church is the temple of the living God; the 'House of the Spirit':

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<sup>15</sup> Note John's statement of Christ's defining act: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!" (Mt 3:11, Mk 1:8, Lk 3:16, Jn 1:33)

- The gathered church is His Temple. Quoting directly from **Ez 37:27** Paul tells the Corinthians they are “the temple of the living God” [**2Co 6:16**], having already explained “you yourselves are God’s temple and God’s Spirit lives in you” [**1Co 3:16**].
- Every individual believer is God’s Temple [**1Co 6:19-20**]. God not only dwells in the midst of His people, but in the lives of individual believers by the same life-giving Spirit.

God’s Presence in the church is not merely a concept or theology; it is to be real, actual, manifest, tangible and transforming! In **Acts 1**, Jesus sets the scene for the whole of the church age by “appearing” amongst His church to give “many convincing demonstrations [unquestionable evidences and infallible proofs]” [**Ac 1:3, Amp**] that He was alive!

We are the fulfillment of God’s eternal longing to dwell amongst His people, and display His glorious Presence! We dare not have any smaller, lower view of ourselves: We are NOT a religious group, a historical nicety; a charity, social-workers, a hospital, a bank.... We are the Temple of the Living God! God Himself has chosen to dwell amongst us: we are His ‘showcase’, His display of splendor in our community. Thus Paul writes:

So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God’s holy people. You are members of God’s family. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

**Eph 2:19-22, NLT**

There is no higher calling, greater privilege, or more sensational destiny!...

## 4.4 Charismatic People

When we understand that we are (only) born again by the work of the Spirit, and that we are the very dwelling-place of the Spirit, we realize we are fundamentally ‘Charismatic’. Everything about the church is the work of the Spirit. Charismatic is not to be a description of a particular style of worship or a badge to indicate giftedness...it is a definition of who and what we are!



## 5 Community People

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### 5.1 Added...

Whilst the church universally is a people, every visible expression of it is a living community. Salvation may be received personally and individually, but the Biblical emphasis is overwhelmingly on the people of God as a community of believers; part of a family [Gal 6:10]; members of God's household [Eph 2:19]. The NT knows nothing of an 'individualistic' gospel; salvation always involves being added to a local church. An authentic Ac 2:38-41 conversion contains four elements, and the last ('being added') is as foundational as the rest; the NT assumes and expects that every believer has repented and put faith in Christ, been baptised, received the Holy Spirit, and been incorporated into the expression of the church in the locality where they live.

The church is far more than a collection of redeemed individuals: it is a community, a 'Body', and the life of a believer is therefore a shared life from the outset. Colson says: "When we become followers of Christ, we become members of His church – and our commitment to the church is indistinguishable from our commitment to Him."<sup>14</sup> John Calvin (1506-1564) believed: "So highly does the Lord esteem the communion of His church that He considers everyone a traitor and apostate from religion who perversely withdraws himself from any Christian society which preserves the true ministry of the word and sacraments."<sup>15</sup>

### 5.2 Made In His Image

This manifestation of 'community' in the church is a reflection of God Himself, who exists eternally in a loving covenant community of Father, Son and Spirit.

Furthermore, this hallmark of community is not the result of human effort, but is the work of Christ and His indwelling Spirit. "The Lord added..." [Ac 2:41]. It is only by the Spirit that true Christian community can be experienced. The post-Pentecost church was devoted to the koinonia (communion; "fellowship recognized and enjoyed"<sup>16</sup>) which the Holy Spirit activated amongst them [Ac 2:42]. The church is the community of the Spirit.

"To be saved"... means to become part of the people of God, who by the Spirit are born into God's family and therefore joined to one another as one body, whose gatherings in the Spirit form them into God's temple. God is not simply saving diverse individuals and preparing them for heaven; rather, he is creating a people

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<sup>14</sup> Colson, *The Body*, p51

<sup>15</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Westminster Press, 1960, 2:1012

<sup>16</sup> W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, entry on "Communion"





for His name, among whom God can dwell, and who in their life together will reproduce God's life and character in all its unity and diversity.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit and the People of God*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1996, 71-72.

## 6 Prophetic People

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The church is an end-time people, living between Christ's first and second coming. We live in the Present Age whilst we await the Age to Come, whose powers we have "already tasted" [Heb 6:5]. We are to pray "your kingdom come" [Mt 6:10a] even though "the kingdom has come" [Mt 12:28]. We are those on whom "the fulfilment of the ages has come" [1Co 10:11].

We have an 'eschatological perspective', conscious of the reality and imminence of Christ's return. Jesus has poured out His Spirit; the future has been set in motion and we are living in the beginning of the End!... This perspective will affect everything: how we live, think, and take our place in the present world, which is passing away. We are an end-time community, "living in the present as those stamped with eternity"<sup>18</sup>.

We are therefore, by nature, prophetic: we exist to speak of the future; to demonstrate God's alternative society; to declare His praises; to worship in Spirit and truth. Our citizenship is in heaven [Phil 3:20] and everything about us is prophetic!

We exist to proclaim and manifest God's will "on earth as it is in heaven" [Mt 6:10b]. Empowered by the Spirit, we are to live the life of the future here in the present. "Tomorrow's age can be more and more our experience today as we increase our demonstration of God's values and standards in every area of our life and influence. We are not to leave everything to be sorted out in the future; we are to live the future now. Tomorrow telescopes back into today as we live in the light of the consummation of all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ."<sup>19</sup> In this way, the church demonstrates the wisdom of God to the cosmic world [Eph 3:8-10]: manifesting the powers and blessings of the age to come.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Fee, Paul, *the Spirit and the People of God*, 52.

<sup>19</sup> Bryn Jones, *The Radical Church*, Destiny Image, 1999, 37.

<sup>20</sup> Eg, experiencing healing (and living in health) is a powerful prophetic demonstration of the age to come, since that age is one in which there will be no sickness, no premature death [Isa 65:17-22], and (when Christ returns) no death whatsoever. [Rev 21:1-6].



## | 7 Betrothed People

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Finally, the church is a betrothed people; the “bride of Christ”, living in anticipation of His return! Christ’s relationship with His Bride is one of unqualified and unconditional love. And, as his bride, the church is called to faithfulness, purity and single-minded devotion. Christ is jealous for our love, and will not tolerate rival affections. The church has a glorious destiny; every blemish will be dealt with before the return of Christ. In the meantime we must live with anticipation and expectation, seeking to speed the day as we make ourselves ready [Rev 19:7] by lives of purity and faithfulness.

## | What Is The Church?

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The church urgently needs a higher view of itself, and the Scriptures provide it for us. She is God's people; those who have seen Christ, been called out of the world, and been reborn from above. She is God's covenant people, the children of Abraham destined to fill the earth and bless the whole world. She is uniquely distinguished as the people of God's Presence; a living, charismatic people wherein God dwells by His Spirit. She is a community, a family and a body of believers expressing God's radical alternative society. She is a prophetic, end-time people, living in the power and blessings of the future age. And she is the Bride of Christ; betrothed to her Saviour and preparing herself and others for His glorious return!...