

# 07 | Body Church



## Introduction

What does the word 'church' mean to you? To some, it means the building where Christians meet on Sundays. To others, it's the epitome of everything religious and irrelevant summed up in one word. So, what is the Church? Who is the Church? What does the Church do?

## The birth of the Church

The beginning of the New Testament Church, and the example we should follow, is found throughout the Book of Acts. The Church as it is today, was birthed in an upstairs lounge nearly two thousand years ago. The first church service was a prayer meeting!

<sup>1</sup>*They (the believers) all joined together in prayer... Acts 1:14 (NIV)*

<sup>1</sup>*On the day of Pentecost, seven weeks after Jesus' resurrection, the believers were meeting together in one place. <sup>2</sup>Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm in the skies above them, and it filled the house where they were meeting. <sup>3</sup>Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. <sup>4</sup>And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability. Acts 2:1-4 (NLT)*

This was the birth of the Church. A prayer meeting in an upstairs lounge. After the first Church prayer meeting was the first Church sermon... outside.

<sup>14</sup>*Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, "Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this.*

<sup>15</sup>*Some of you are saying these people are drunk. It isn't true! It's much too early for that. People don't get drunk by nine o'clock in the morning...*

<sup>36</sup>*So let it be clearly known by everyone in Israel that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified to be both Lord and Messiah!"*

<sup>37</sup>*Peter's words convicted them deeply, and they said to him and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"*

<sup>38</sup>*Peter replied, "Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup>This promise is to you and to your children, and even to the Gentiles—all who have been called by the Lord our God." <sup>40</sup>Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this generation that has gone astray!"*

<sup>41</sup>*Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church—about three thousand in all. Acts 2:14-15, 37-41 (NLT)*

## The life of the early Church

What was Church life really like in the beginning?

<sup>42</sup>*They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer.*

<sup>43</sup>*A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. <sup>44</sup>And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had.*

<sup>45</sup>*They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. <sup>46</sup>They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—<sup>47</sup>all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.*

**Acts 2:42-47 (NLT)**

We can plainly see that the Church as it was when it was birthed and the Church as we know it today is very different. Is what we call 'church' today, really what Jesus had in mind when He said...

*"I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it."* **Matthew 16:18b (NLT)**

Let's explore what church is really about...

## Church is not a building

*A man was answering questions for a national poll. When asked for his church preference, he responded, "Red brick."*

Everyone these days calls the church building 'church'. We say things like, "Hey, are you going to church tonight?". We all do it, and it isn't necessarily a bad thing, but originally the word 'Church' was never meant to be associated with a building. A building isn't the Church... we are. If you are a Christian, you become a member of Christ's Body, the Church. The word 'Church' comes from the Greek word 'ecclesia' which is literally translated 'assembly'. In the past, 'Church' was an ordinary everyday word meaning 'an assembly of people'. An amplified meaning for ecclesia, or church is:

- **"...called out from, with the purpose of coming together."**

As Christians, we are called out of the world and become part of the body of believers. This doesn't mean that you go and live in a monastery or commune, a hundred miles away from anything 'worldly'. It means you do not live a sinful, self-indulgent lifestyle anymore, but impact the world for Jesus because you regularly meet with other believers for prayer, study, encouragement, fellowship etc. The Church was never meant to be a 'bless-me' club. Church is Christians meeting regularly together, fully committed to Christ.

## God's House

In the Old Testament, buildings and places of worship to God were called 'God's House'. With the birth of the Church in the New Testament the description of God's House changed significantly. God's House was no longer a building but a People, a community of Believers.

Church has been traditionally known as the meeting place of Believers but it is so much more than that. The Church is Christians worldwide or location/citywide.

<sup>16</sup>*After you have read this letter, pass it on to the church at Laodicea so they can read it, too.*  
**Colossians 4:11a (NLT)**

Church is also the term used for communities of believers within a city. We now call these specific gatherings of believers 'local churches' to save confusion.

*I am also writing to the church that meets in your house.* **Philemon 1:2b (NLT)**

God gives a person (or groups of believers) a vision and a community of Believers is born. That community (fellowship, local church) begins to grow as people are saved through it and people are called to it. We all must commit ourselves to one of these 'local churches' and submit ourselves to the spiritual oversight that leads it. Why? Because we all need instruction, correction, encouragement and wisdom from those who God has called to be responsible for our souls. If we aren't committed to a local congregation, we forfeit the security and support that accountability brings. When you are fully committed to a local church, you will give your time and effort into seeing its vision fulfilled.

## Denominations

God places certain visions and purposes on whole congregations of believers. The modern day Church with all its various identities and denominations (specific types of churches) can be likened to the twelve tribes of Israel travelling to, and possessing the Promised Land. Each tribe had its own unique identity and assigned tasks to do, but when an enemy rose up to attack them, all of the tribes helped each other and fought side by side to win the victory. Sadly, the Israelite Tribes started fighting against each other. Just like the tribes of Israel, local churches have their own unique identity and calling, and we all have a common enemy, Satan and His demons, who we should fight against side by side, helping each other and supporting each other. In reality, many local churches and denominations fight against each other, division comes and Satan wins a great victory.

Some people strongly believe that denominations are not of God, as there were no factions in the early church, and therefore shouldn't be today. I believe that many different styles and flavours of church is a great thing, as long as we take heed of Paul's instruction concerning church divisions...

*<sup>10</sup>Now, dear brothers and sisters, I appeal to you by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop arguing among yourselves. Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church. I plead with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.*

**1 Corinthians 1:10 (NLT)**

## All Christians should meet together regularly

*<sup>44</sup>And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. <sup>45</sup>They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. <sup>46</sup>They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity...* **Acts 2:44-46 (NLT)**

Notice the words 'constantly' and 'each day'. The Early Church met in large and small groups very regularly! Sadly, many Christians attend as few church meetings as possible.

*<sup>1</sup>I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."* **Psalms 122:1 (NLT)**

*<sup>36</sup>Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher, and was very old. She was a widow, for her husband had died when they had been married only seven years. <sup>37</sup>She was now eighty-four years old. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. <sup>38</sup>She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about Jesus to everyone who had been waiting for the promised King to come and deliver Jerusalem.*

**Luke 2:36-38 (NLT)**

Think about a glowing ember. If it is by itself it will lose its heat and grow cold. If it is with other embers, all the embers keep each other hot, and warm everything around them. It's exactly the same with church. If you don't meet regularly together with other Christians for prayer, worship, study and encouragement, you will lose your spiritual fire and grow cold. Also, 'lone-ranger' Christians that don't regularly fellowship and who separate themselves from other Christians, put themselves in great danger of falling into deception. The danger with deception is that you don't know you're deceived. That is why we must have close relationships with other Christians who can teach us, correct us, and encourage us in our journey with God.

*<sup>25</sup>And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.*

**Hebrews 10:25 (NLT)**

If you took the same excuses that people use for not going to church and apply them to other important areas of life you'd realize how inconsistent we can be in our logic.

### **Reasons Not To Wash**

1. I was forced to as a child.
2. People who make soap are only after your money.
3. I wash on special occasions like Christmas and Easter.
4. People who wash are hypocrites-they think they are cleaner than everyone else.
5. There are so many different kinds of soap, I can't decide which one is best.
6. I used to wash, but it got boring so I stopped.
7. None of my friends wash.
8. The bathroom is never warm enough in the winter or cool enough in the summer.
9. I'll start washing when I get older and dirtier.
10. I can't spare the time <sup>1</sup>

## Our passion for Church shows our passion for God

*<sup>9</sup>Passion for your house burns within me...* **Psalms 69:9a (NLT)**

I believe that our passion for the local church reveals a lot about our passion for God. If we are passionate about God, we will be passionate about our local church. If we haven't got a zeal for our local church, then our zeal for God is misguided, and without knowledge.

The above paragraph may be upsetting for those people who are not keen on being committed to a local community of believers, but sometimes the truth hurts. Many Christians vehemently attack the institution that God has put in place and preach that we do not need to meet together. No community of believers is perfect, because human-nature is frail, but to reject the House of God, in my opinion, is to fall into serious doctrinal error and deception.

## Churches have problems because people have problems

Every church has problems. This is because the church is made up of people and people have problems. So many people leave churches because the church has problems in some form or another. Maybe the pastor preaches too long, or the music is too loud, or the seats are too uncomfortable (etc.). They go to another church where they think everything is perfect, but after a while leave that church also, because that church has got... problems. That person will never find the perfect church, because they have problems.

Every fellowship has its strengths and weaknesses. The Church is made up of people of all shapes and sizes, all differing in races, cultures, ages, trends, opinions, emphases etc. And God has designed it that way Churches should cater for the different groups involved but everyone should all still regularly meet together as Christ's Body to worship God in unity. To some, that means fellowshiping with someone they don't particularly get along with. It's called 'sandpaper ministry' and it is good for us! To others, it means crossing the cultural or age barrier which is hard for some people as well. The Church is made up of all people with one thing in common... loving and serving God with all of their heart.

## Pastors aren't supposed to build up the Church... you are

*<sup>11</sup>He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. <sup>12</sup>Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, **Ephesians 4:11-12 (NLT)***

Pastors and leaders exist to **equip God's people to do His work and build up the church!** It cannot be clearer than that. The pastor's job is to equip believers to go and impact this world for Christ. The pastor can't impact your friends, family and workmates like you can. Neither can your youth pastor or your smallgroup leader. Your mission in life is to know God and make God known... The pastoral team, are there to support, encourage and equip you to do so!

Many people leave church because it is not meeting their needs. The Church doesn't exist for you. You (the Church) exist for Christ and for His purposes and glory. We gather together for encouragement and nurture, yes, but Church doesn't revolve around us and our needs. As part of the Church we can help each other out, giving of our time to be an encouragement to others.

*"You are the Church. If something isn't being done, it's because you aren't doing it."*  
**Paul de Jong**

## A Church that is boring and irrelevant isn't Jesus' idea of Church

The Church is Jesus representative on planet Earth. Jesus was the most relevant and exiting person around. Sinners actually wanted to be around Him. Do sinners want to be around our churches? Hmmm. Something is wrong.

The Church must be relevant to impact this world for Jesus. Old hymns impact elderly people, that is being relevant to elderly people, but not to a lost generation of youth. Contemporary music may be relevant to a lost generation of youth, but not to the elderly. We must make room in our programmes and ministries to be relevant to all people everywhere. Did you ever notice how Jesus related to the prostitutes one minute, then related to the Spiritual leaders? It is not the package that's important, it's the message. Sadly, so many people think that the package is what is important, and miss the point all together.

## Finding our place in the Body

For the Church to be all that Jesus wanted it to be, we all need to play our part, as little pieces coming together to complete the big picture. The very idea of 'fast-food' church (zooming in, getting fed, and zooming out) with no responsibility and no contribution is completely opposite to the New Testament pattern of what Church is. The Church is a community of Believers, being involved, being Christ's Body, One Body.

*<sup>4</sup>Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, <sup>5</sup>so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.*

**Romans 12:4-5 (NLT)**

## Are you a team player or spectator?

One of Satan's most effective weapons against the Church in the western world today, is that he has caused most of the Church to become spectators and not team players. Let me explain. There are two types of 'church folk'.

There are 'spectators' (Christians who are uncommitted, intermittent attendees... observers but not contributors), and then there are 'team players' (Christians who are committed to the local church they attend, actively participating and serving wherever necessary to see the fellowship's vision fulfilled and this world impacted for Jesus). Sadly, many fall into the first category. Below is a candid look at church services compared to a football game.

- **Spectators** turn up to watch the match. They never come early for the warm-up and team talk, and they leave as soon as the game is over, often early to beat the traffic (unless there are free refreshments).
- **Team players** are fully committed. They attend practices, team-talks, and every morale raiser. They train regularly, eat the right food and stay healthy. They attend every game, and when the team is on a losing streak, they stay committed.
- **Spectators**, eagerly watch the match, cheer the team when it is winning, boo the team when it is losing, and don't turn up at the field until the next game (unless there's a better game on TV, or a more exciting game elsewhere).
- **Team players** aren't in it for themselves. They play as one team, working together to reach the goal, doing all they can to benefit the team, playing in their position to the best of their ability.
- **Spectators** look like team players. They wear all the gears but in reality are only imitations of the real thing. Many are physically unfit and the term 'armchair critic'
- **Team players**, who are on the reserve bench, are still very much a part of the team, supporting and encouraging, their teammates. They are as disciplined and trained as the players on field, and are always ready to play, to be sent out onto the field.

## Conclusion

I hope this study has blown away any misconceptions about the Church you may have had. In conclusion, consider the following questions...

- Do you attend church to be entertained, or to serve?
- When was the last time you attended the pre-service prayer meeting?
- Are you fully committed to your fellowship?
- Have you made yourself available to serve the fellowship wherever necessary?
- Are you involved in accountable Christian relationships?
- Are you a team player, or a spectator?

*You don't judge an army's strength by how many people sit in the mess hall. You judge an army on the basis of how many people are trained and active on the front line. The percentage of members being mobilized for ministry and missions is a more reliable indicator of health than how many people attend services. **Rick Warren***

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**References:**

<sup>1</sup> Source unknown