

## **HOME GROUP BIBLE STUDIES: CHRIST'S GLORIOUS CHURCH**

### **1. The Church – God's Saved People**

**Aim:** To help us appreciate the Lord's church and its establishment.

**Discuss:** People have such contrasting views on church. The word *church* can bring up painful memories. For others, *church* is merely a building associated with certain practices/programs. *[Discuss]*  
*In the New Testament, the Greek word for church is ekklesia. The original meaning is "called out ones". Its common meaning is "assembling together (of believers)". So, what is church?*

Church is not a building; even our new build is not "church". Nor is it performing certain programs and practices. It's the assembling together of people who have been called out of this world to be God's people through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Peter 2:9-10). Church is when we gather together in Jesus' name.

In this home group series on "Christ's Church", we will be considering *church* and what *church* is meant to be about, according to God and His Word. *What do you think church should be about? [Discuss]*

#### **The Establishment of the First Church: (Acts 2:1-4; 32-40)**

*When and how was the first church established? (Acts 2:1-4)*

After Christ's atoning death and His resurrection from the dead, the Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into the lives of His followers on the Day of Pentecost – on that day the church was born.

*Before His ascension, in Acts 1:4-8, Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit. What do we learn?*

The Spirit was promised by God the Father (Ezek 36:27), and even Jesus affirmed this promise during His earthly ministry (John 14:16-18). He would come and give power to Christ's followers to proclaim Christ's name to the world. He also would bless and give spiritual life (cf. John 7:37-39; Rom 8:11).

*When the Spirit first came, how did it happen and what did He do? (Acts 2:1-4; 11)*

He came powerfully and supernaturally for all to see and observe. The disciples of Jesus spoke in unlearned languages, and in those new languages, others heard them speak of the mighty deeds of God.

*What was this a picture and a foretaste of?*

It was a picture and a foretaste of how the Gospel (what God has done for us in Christ) would be declared in all the languages of the world to all the people groups of the world so that others might be saved.

*With conviction, courage and clarity, the apostle Peter preached the first sermon after the church was born. What was the heart of His message? (Acts 2:22-24, 33-36)*

Jesus Christ died according to the will of God (v.23), was raised from the dead by God (v.24), and has been declared by God to be Lord and Christ (our Saviour King).

*In order for others to be part of Christ's church (and to be saved from their sins), what did Peter command the crowd to do in Acts 2:37-40? Why?*

He commanded them to repent of their sins and be baptised. Through repentance and faith in Christ we are forgiven of our sins and receive the Holy Spirit. We also are commanded to get baptised, not for salvation, but in order to obey Christ (Matt 28:19-20) and to publicly declare our allegiance to Him.

#### **Life in the First Church: (Acts 2:41-47)**

*On the first day of the church, 3000 people became Christians (Acts 2:41). They became a changed people. What characterised their new life in Christ because of the Holy Spirit? (Acts 2:42)*

They became devoted to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

*Today what does it practically look like to live out Acts 2:42? What do we normally call this?*

It means coming together under the teaching of God's Word (and especially the New Testament), and having fellowship in Jesus' name, having communion (breaking bread), and praying. This is church!

*According to Acts 2:43-47, what did the first church look like as they lived out Acts 2:42?*

There was a sense of awe toward God as He did miracles through His apostles. Also, being filled with the Spirit, the people were selfless, loving and caring for each other so that no one was in need. They also were one people, gladly meeting together, and worshipping God together. Outsiders were impressed!

*In Acts 2:47 what was God doing daily? What enabled God's work to be done unhindered?*

God was growing the church; it's His sovereign work (John 6:44). But God loves to use His saved children (His church), with their transformed lives to proclaim to others the reality of Christ. *Do we?*

**Summary:** God established His church through Christ's work and the empowering of His Spirit. Church should look like Acts 2:42-47 (even without apostles). *How do we compare?*

## **2. The Church: The Body and Bride of Christ**

**Aim:** To help us learn how God intends for us to function as members in His church.

**Discuss:** *At the base of the human brain is a small organ called the pituitary gland. By appearances it wouldn't seem to be an important organ. But this tiny gland is a vital regulator, secreting hormones that are critical to the functioning of other organs in the body. With the nervous system it co-ordinates and integrates body mechanisms. In many ways "Every Christian is like a pituitary gland". In what way?* We are part of the body of Christ, and like a pituitary gland in the human body, our service in Christ's body is really important. By attending and encouraging fellow believers, using our spiritual gifts and serving each other in various ways, we bless and help other believers to grow and function well.

### **The Body of Christ**

*In 1 Cor 12:12-14, and also v.27, what is the church?*

The church is the body of Christ, and each Christian is a member (body part) of Christ's church. The church is not a building, or institution – it is Christ's body that He has given birth to through His Spirit.

*Like how each body part has a different function and the whole body relies on individual body parts functioning, what has God done in the body of Christ? (1 Cor 12:4-11)*

God has given to each Christian different spiritual gifts/ministries/roles to serve the rest of Christ's body. The rest of the body of Christ relies on us functioning well to maintain health and life in the body of Christ.

*Has every genuine Christian (born again) been given a gift(s) from the Spirit? (1 Cor 12:7, 11)*

Yes! Every Christian has been given one or more spiritual gifts to use in Christ's body.

*What should we keep in mind when we talk about our spiritual gifts? (1 Cor 12:4-6, 11)*

Spiritual gifts are a gift from God. We didn't produce them in ourselves. So don't boast, but be thankful.

*Why does God give spiritual gifts to Christians in His church? (1 Cor 12:7; Eph 4:11-13)*

Gifts have been given for the good of the church, and to help equip us and grow us to maturity in Christ.

*Can we demand God to give us the gifts we want? (1 Cor 12:11; 14:1)*

We can desire spiritual gifts and ask God for certain ones, but what He gives us is according to His will.

*Read 1 Cor 12:14-21. What attitude toward ourselves and others are we to guard against?*

In regard to ourselves we are not to think that our gift(s) is unimportant. Every gift has been given by God for a noble purpose. Also, toward others, we are not to despise or covet the gifts that others have.

*What reassurance do we have when we don't feel very important in the church? (1 Cor 12:22-25)*

God has given the seemingly insignificant gifts/roles in Christ's church greater honour.

*According to 1 Cor 12:25-26, why has God done things the way He has?*

He has done things in such a way so that there may be unity, care, and equal concern for each other.

*Based on 1 Cor 12, what conclusion should we draw?*

We all have gifts/ministries/roles that God wants us to use/do for His service and to benefit each other.

### **The Bride of Christ**

*Besides the church being the "body of Christ", how else is the church described in Rev 19:7-9?*

The church is the bride of Christ, and one day in glory there will be the marriage of the Lamb to His bride.

*In Eph 5:22-33 what illustration does Paul use when writing about Christian marriage? Why?*

The illustration of Christ and the church is used for marriage, because the relationship between Christ and His church is like a marriage; indeed, it is a marriage – the highest one of all.

*How does Christ relate to His bride, the church? (Eph 5:23, 25-32)*

He is the head of the church, and as the head, He loves us and gave Himself for us (at the cross), in order to cleanse us from sin, and to make us right and glorious. We are also His body, and are one with Him now.

*How are we, the bride of Christ and the body of Christ, to relate to Christ? (Eph 5:22-24)*

We are to submit ourselves to our Lord Jesus Christ, honouring and respecting Him as our Head.

*In submitting to Christ, out of reverence for Him, how are we to relate to each other? (Eph 5:21)*

We are to submit to one another (to the members of His body). This means serving one another above ourselves, and using our gifts and abilities to bless and help one another. Do we live this out?

**Summary: The church is not an organisation but a living entity; we are the body of Christ and the bride of Christ. It breathes with God's Spirit, grows by God's design, and functions through the gifts God has given to it. Christ wants all the members of His body to be active in serving one another.**

### 3. The Church: The House of God

**Aim:** To help us understand how the church is a spiritual building held together in and by Christ.

**Discuss:** *A single brick, by itself, is useless. It’s even a nuisance; left on a path it may trip up a person. But a brick properly positioned with other bricks, according to a master design, can result in a useful and impressive structure. How does this analogy relate to Christ’s Church? (Read 1 Pet 2:5)*

The church is a spiritual building where every Christian is a brick (stone) in that building. Just as every brick in a building has a place and a part to play in the overall structure, every Christian has a place and a part to play in Christ’s church. When we go it alone, we are ineffective, and cause the church to be lacking. When we connect and work with others, we help each other fulfil God’s purpose and build His church (cf. also a useful and impressive structure would not look right if one single brick was missing).

#### **Living Stones (1 Peter 2:4-10)**

*Once we were dead stones, and we were not part of God’s spiritual house (not part of His church). How do we become “living stones” in God’s house? (1 Pet 2:4-5)*

We must come to Jesus, the Living Stone who gives spiritual life to us “dead stones”. By coming to Jesus, and through His Spirit, we are made into “living stones” and become part of God’s spiritual house.

*What is significant about the church being called a “spiritual house” in 1 Pet 2:5?*

We are now God’s temple (spiritual house) here on earth; no longer is it a grand physical building like in the Old Testament. As God dwelt in the temple of old, now He dwells in His people (His spiritual house). Also, in this house we find shelter and security and are spiritually nurtured. This is the church.

*Consider the service in the temple in the Old Testament period. What is the service that is to be done in the new spiritual house (temple) that God has established in Christ (ie, the church)? (1 Pet 2:5)*

In the Old Testament, the temple was the place where priests ministered to God and the people, and offered up physical sacrifices to atone for sin and to thank God. Now, as God’s new spiritual house (temple) we are all to serve as priests, ministering to God and to each other. Together we offer up spiritual sacrifices, not physical sacrifices, which include the worship of God and service to Him and His people.

*What’s the connection between Jesus and this new building God has established? (1 Pet 2:4,6)*

God has made His Son the “choice stone” and “cornerstone” of His house; the church. These terms are used for the first stone laid in a building. It’s the most perfect, true and strong stone, and from it a building is built. What a picture of Christ! Jesus is the perfect Son of God, who is true and strong, and through His death and resurrection, God has made Him the cornerstone of His house. As we come to Him and line up our life with Him (making Jesus our Lord and Saviour), we become part of God’s building.

*How does God view this “cornerstone”? How should we? (1 Pet 2:4,6)*

God views Jesus as precious and choice. Though many reject Christ, we are to view Him as God does. He is precious, and we are to come to Him and believe in Him. All who do will never be disappointed.

*What does it say in 1 Peter 2:7-8 about those who have not come to Jesus and believed in Him?*

They are not part of God’s house. By rejecting Jesus, one day they will stumble and fall into eternal ruin.

*What purpose does God have for His church? (1 Peter 2:9-10)*

As God’s chosen and special people, we are to proclaim the glory and greatness of our God to others. We ought to do this all the more because of what God has done for us and what He has made us into.

#### **The Mortar (Ephesians 4:1-16)**

*We are living stones in God’s house, but what’s the “mortar” that holds us together? (Eph 4:4-6)*

We are one – one body through one Spirit in us. We have one Lord, one faith, one hope, one Father.

*As living stones, how can we practically contribute to having “mortar” to hold us? (Eph 4:1-3)*

We are to be Christ-like toward each other; humble, gentle, patient, and bearing with one another in love.

*What else contributes to our unity, and creates the “mortar” amongst us? (Eph 4:7-16)*

Christ has given us, by His Spirit, spiritual gifts and various ministries. It’s what we supply to each other through our gifts and service under His Lordship that helps hold us together. Ultimately, Christ (v.16) is the One who fits us and holds us together, as we submit to His Lordship and serve Him.

*When we all contribute and have spiritual gifts functioning, what blessings occur? (Eph 4:13-16)*

We have unity, maturity, security and love. We won’t collapse or crumble; even from attack or opposition.

**Summary: We are living stones that are to be together so that God can build His church.**

## **4. The Church: Contributing or Consuming?**

**Aim:** To examine three attitudes amongst Christians that contribute to the church's shortcomings: Self-sufficiency, consumerism, and "minister does all".

**Discuss:** You have had enough paying for expensive tools every time you want to do a job around your house. So you come up with a plan. You call your neighbours together and suggest that they start a tool-lending service. They enthusiastically agree. On the first weekend, your neighbours take your tools for things they need to do. As a result, you wait until next weekend to do your jobs. But by next weekend no one returns your tools. They don't even lend their tools to you. There is no "giving"; only "taking".

Consider when the "taking" attitude is dominant in a church, rather than "giving". What results?

This study will examine some of the church's shortcomings in the light of how we should be.

### **Qualities of the New Testament Church**

*Read Acts 2:44-47 and Acts 4:32-37. What things characterised the New Testament church?*

They shared what they had with other believers, they cared for those in need, they loved to be together, they had one heart and mind, and they loved praising God, enjoying gladness, sincerity and God's grace.

*How does the modern-day church compare with the New Testament church?*

The church, in general, does not have the same enthusiasm and dedication for fellowship, sharing with others, caring for the poor and helpless, and being one (or working at being one) with other believers.

*Why does the church today fall short of the standard set by the New Testament church?*

One reason is that we have allowed the world to influence us, rather than Christ. The world encourages the promotion of self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and a "take all" attitude. Christ doesn't (Mark 10:42-45).

### **Enemies of the Modern Church:**

#### **1. The Self-Sufficiency Attitude**

*In what way has self-sufficiency in our culture affected us?*

Self-sufficiency encourages us to believe that depending on others is a sign of weakness, that we should own our own things rather than borrow, that success is the absence of need and the protection against any economic/personal crisis. Many of us have achieved self-sufficiency, but the accompanying attitudes have led us to be tight-fisted, viewing our possessions as being our own, and using them only for ourselves.

*Read Acts 4:32-37 again. How did the first Christians regard their possessions?*

They shared their possessions so that no one was in need. The needy were esteemed; not demeaned.

*What are some important changes we need to make to stop the "self-sufficiency" epidemic?*

We need to realise that our possessions are the Lord's, and that we are to be good tenants of what He has given us (1 Cor 4:7; Luke 16:10-13). We are to share our possessions with others; especially the needy.

#### **2. The Consumerism Attitude**

*Many Christians attend church with a wrong attitude. What attitude is this?*

They go for the purpose of what they can get out of it; stimulation, entertainment, a "pick me-up", etc.

*Why is the consumerism attitude prevalent among so many Christians?*

We have allowed our fallen nature to influence our thinking so that we view church in regard to how it will satisfy our desires/wants. Also, the influence of the world will drive us to this attitude.

*What happens if we have a consumerism attitude and don't get what we want?*

We often go elsewhere. We have no desire to stay and help a church, through service and contribution.

*When we are dominated by consumerism, what important Christian attitudes are missing?*

We are not "other" focussed, giving and serving others, as we have been taught (John 13:12-17; Phil 2:1-8).

*What change can we make so that we become a serving, giving and contributing Christian?*

We need to fix our eyes on Jesus and follow His example – He gave Himself and served us (Mark 10:45).

#### **3. The "Minister does all" Attitude**

*Another damaging attitude in church is the "minister does all" one. Where does it come from?*

It comes from wrong thinking: "the minister is paid to do the work". It comes from wrong priorities: "I'm too busy to serve, so the paid minister will do it". It comes from bad ministers: "I'm the only one able".

*Read Ephesians 4:11-13. What's the role of church leaders (ministers)?*

They are to use their God-given gifts to equip God's people for ministry. They are not called to do it all.

*Is God using me and my gifts to benefit the local church? Am I involved in the Lord's work?*

**Summary:** Your church will be a better place if you contribute to it rather than take from it.