

## INTRODUCTION

### The Church a current view

- John Wimber , a well known church growth consultant, had his thought about an advertising leaflet when he first planted a church. '**Why do these people look so happy?**' **The answer; 'They are going to heaven but don't have to go to church!'**
- 'In continuing research among teenagers and adolescents shows that the trend away from adopting biblical theology in favor of syncretic, culture-based theology is advancing at full gallop.'" Brainwashing in America
- The church has been riddled with sex & money scandals over the last 20 years particularly.
- While nearly half of the adult American population attends religious services during a typical week, people's conceptual bond to the local church remains tenuous. Fewer than one out of every five adults **firmly believes that a congregational church is a critical element in their spiritual growth** and just as few strongly contend that participation in some type of community of faith is required for them to achieve their full potential.
- They even have a church called the **church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster**

### We can all Relate

- I think many of us who have been going to church for some time relate to these statistics. And while we know deep down the importance of belonging to a local church, there *remains in us a measure of caution & reserve* for many reasons.
- **Painful experiences – when someone sinned against you -**
  - Maybe you were sinned against in church. This happens because we have people in the church that are still in the process of being redeemed.
  - Maybe you couldn't do what you wanted to & as a result your ego was hurt
- **Intimacy issues**
  - Church is a place where people get close. It supposed to be that way as it is the family of God. Maybe you are afraid of being too close to people. Perhaps they will see the real you.
- **Expectation issues**
  - Maybe the church is going to expect more from me than what I can give.
- **Control issues**
  - 'I am the boss of my life & ask directions from nobody!'
- **Fear issues**
  - I am afraid I might turn out like one of these 'happy clappy' Jesus freaks.
  - I am afraid God of letting God have too much of me
    - I am afraid of the spooky nature of church (demons, deliverance, people falling over)
    - I am afraid others will think of me as goody 2 shoes.
- Etc, etc ad infinitum , ad nauseum

- **Whatever we think about church, what the world thinks about the church is really immaterial. Why? What is important is what God thinks about the church.**

## **CHURCH IN THE HEART OF GOD**

From the beginning of time God has ***always established*** a grouping of people that are ekklesia 'called out ones', that is, (concretely) a popular meeting, especially a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue, or Christian community of members on earth or saints in heaven or both): - assembly, church.

When we read the OT it is not simply a historical document but a living, active prophetic illustration in word, picture & symbol of God's purposes & plan.

## **Prophecy about the Church**

- **Isa 61:4** They will ***rebuild the ancient ruins*** and restore the places long devastated; they will ***renew the ruined cities*** that have been devastated for generations. Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. And you will be ***called priests of the LORD***, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.
  - This is fulfilled in our day – **1 Pe 2:9-10** But you are a chosen people, ***a royal priesthood***, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy
  - Who or what is this city? - **Eph 2:21-22** In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.
- **Isa 62:1-7**
  - **Zion & Jerusalem** are representative of the church
    - For her `sake we must not keep silent or quiet until ***she shines like the dawn & her salvation like a blazing torch.***
    - **The church will be a royal diadem** in the hand of our God
    - The **bride & bridegroom** is the picture of the church
      - John 3:29 – John the Baptist
      - Eph 5:31-32
    - ***Give God no rest till he establishes Jerusalem (the church) and makes her the praise of the earth.***  
 This prophecy is **not for the individual**  
 There was a popular thought & saying a while ago "I am the church!" There is simply no scriptural basis for this understanding. It would like my foot saying that it is the body.  
 You can't have church by yourself
- ***Getting a heart for the church in all its expressions is what is required.***

- David said 'One day in the courts of the Lord is better than a thousand anywhere else'
- We have no business doing any ministry of the bridegroom unless we love the bride.
- Jesus is building **His Church Nothing Else**. (Nothing else endures) **Matthew 16:16-20**
  - He is not building my ministry or any other ministry.
    - **Romans 16:1**. I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church(not her ministry) in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.
    - Does the ministry we are a part of, serve our church?
    - Is our nametag on the dress that the bride is wearing?
  - He is not building my Lifestyle
    - **Haggai 1:1-11**
  - He is not building my business
  - He is not building my career
  - He is not even building my family, He is building His.(Math 12:48)
  - He is not building my future but His, so that my future is guaranteed.
    - Jesus is building His church what are we building?
- When we see **Jesus do we see church?**
  - He is the Cornerstone of His Church {**Ephesians 2: 20-22**}
  - He is the Head of His church {**Ephes 1:22-23, Ephes 5:23**}
  - He is the bridegroom & His church is the Bride { Math 25:1-12, John 3:29, **Rev 19:6-8**}
  - The biblical way of developing relationship with Jesus is both communal & individual.
    - As a member of a family much of your relationship with your parents will revolve around your communal times together particularly the meal.
    - The meal in the church family is not about food but about feeding on God's word.
    - Sadly many of us may not have enjoyed regular communal family times together and thus don't understand its importance.
- *How do we Change?*
  - Adjust our motives
  - Adjust our perspectives
    - What does the bible teach?
    - Does the bible teach on God building anything else?
  - Unlearn and re Learn
  - Be prepared to change

## SESSION 2

- **Paul Focused** on *strengthening* the church not 'Paul Apostolic Ministries International'
  - **Acts 15: 40-41** but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.
  - **Acts 18:23**. After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.
  - **2 Corinthians 12:19**. Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.
  - **1 Thes 3: 2** We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith,
  - Jesus calls for it
    - **Luke 22: 32** But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."
- **Divided Loyalty**
  - Once we have established that what God is building is His church then we can move on but there can be no divided loyalty in what we are building
  - **Matt 6:24**. "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.
    - If you are trying to build the church & a ministry, a career, a lifestyle, a business etc; you will have divided loyalties. You will love one & hate the other.
    - Seek first the kingdom & God will add to you.
  - Heart revelation not just a head revelation
    - Lord I want to work with you to build up your church

### How the Church is build up?

- The Church is built up by the Holy Spirit
  - **Acts 9:31**. Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.
  - **Jude 20** But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.
  - We Need to be in prayer asking for the Holy Spirit
    - **Luke 11:13** If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

- Love builds up
  - **1 Corinthians 8:1.** Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.
  - **Ephes 4: 15 -16** Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.
- Growth builds up the church
  - **Acts 16:15** So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.
- Spiritual gifts build up the church
  - **1 Corinthians 14: 12** So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.
  - **1 Cor 15: 26.** What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.
- Being joined together builds up the church
  - **Ephes 2:21** In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. 1 Peter 2:5
- The Gift ministries build up the church
  - **Ephes 4: 11-12** It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up
- Wholesome Talk builds up the church
  - **Ephes 4: 29.** Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
  - **Grieving of the Holy spirit happens when we talk destructively**
- The Church is built up through teaching
  - **Col 2: 6-7.** So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

## SESSION 3

### How we Join a Local Church

When we first become part of a church we may feel that it was our decision to join a church. However as we become more part of a church we usually come to the realization that it was not me who joined a church but God who joined me to the church.

- **Defining Church**

- The word church in the New Testament comes from a Greek word 'ekklesia', which in most cases is used to refer to an 'assembly' of Christians in a locality.
  - This is however too simple a term to describe the nature of what the scriptures means when it uses the term church.
- The heart of what church is meant in scripture is **more to do with family**. The terms used to describe the church are more **relational than they are organizational**
  - We see this with terms such as 'brothers & sisters in Christ'
    - This is not supposed to be a catch phrase.
  - We see this when Jesus teaches the disciples to use 'dad' when addressing God as our father.
  - **Ephesians 4:14-15**. For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.
- When becoming a part of the church God never intended us to become a part of **an organization or even a denomination** but part of a family.

- **Becoming Part of the Church Universal**

- We need to be Born Again
  - **(John 1:12)** We are spiritually born into Church
  - **(John 3:3)** This is not a physical birth into the church but a spiritual re-birth
    - Not into a denomination
    - Into the whole family of God
  - **(1 Peter 1:23)** The spiritual re-birth is activated as we receive the enduring word of God which is Christ (See *John 1:1*).
    - This is ongoing not just a once off

- How do we know we are Born Again?
  - **Ezek 36:26-31** - I will take away your stubborn heart and give you a new heart (Passion) and a desire to be faithful (Diligence). You will have only pure thoughts, because I will put my Spirit in you and make you eager to obey my laws and teachings (Obedience). You will once again live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God (Relationship). I will protect you from anything that makes you unclean. Your fields will overflow with grain, and no one will starve. Your trees will be filled with fruit, and crops will grow in your fields, so that you will never again feel ashamed for not having enough food. You will remember your evil ways and hate yourselves for what you've done. (Heb 8:10-11)
- **Becoming Part of the Local Church.**
  - Definition: Local church is to the believer what the immediate family is to a child.
    - When I am born I am born firstly into the family of human beings. That comes with a certain privilege that is different than if I was born into a family of monkeys. That right can't be taken away from me no matter what my father, mother, brother or sister may think or say about me.
    - I am also born into a country with laws that supersede & protect my rights above those of my immediate family.
      - They can't treat me simply as their property to do with as they like.
      - They can't send me to work before a certain age
    - But I am also born into an immediate family that are the primary ones responsible to care for me, nurture & discipline me so that I can be a positive part of human kind. I will spend most of my time with that particular family. As a child my benefit to human kind will be mostly determined by my immediate family.
      - Your immediate family are the ones you are **primarily influenced by & the ones you go to bat for**. 'I might fight with my brother but don't you try'
    - *Local Church would be the spiritual equivalent of your immediate family.*
  - The local church you join should be a place that you can experience as **family first**.
    - When you join a church you should feel like you can become a part of a family and not an organization.
    - You like the people (all ages)
    - This is why we look for friendship before a person functions.

- The local church you join should be a place where you can receive your **primary influence** .
  - You are able to receive direction, discipline & doctrine.
  - You are not trying to change them but allowing them under Christ to transform you (**Ephes 4:10**)
  - This will be a natural thing if this is your family. Except
    - if you are in the teenage/rebellious phase of your spiritual walk
    - if you are struggling with childhood issues
  
- The local church you join should not be a **chore or a bore**.{If every church is a chore & a bore then your issue is with God not the church}
  - Can you relate to *what* is Said & Sung?
  - Can you relate to *the way* it is Said & Sung?
  - Can you relate to *the why* it is Said & Sung?

## How do we become a Vibrant Part of a Church

### • **Purpose**

- **Luke 19:10** Jesus came to *seek & save* the lost
  - Salvation is indicated by change
- **Matth 4:19** I will make you *fishers of men*
- **Matth 5:16** You are *Salt & Light*
- **Matth 28 :19** *Go make disciples*
  - Discipleship begins as a person embarks on a journey within the community of faith, the church
- **Luke 15:7** The parable of the *Lost Sheep & Lost Coin*
  - *'I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent'*
- *The purpose is out there* where we are the church not where we gather as a church
  - A lot of pressure mounts up when we see our primary purpose as exercising my gift within the context of gathering
  - There are many ministries wanting to draw from the church pie & not from the world Jesus died to save.

### • **People**

- The reason you are part of a church is that God wants you to fulfill His purpose with these people.
- **Ephes 3:10** God wants this because as a grouping of Christians, the church *represents the family of God to the world.*
  - This is why it is important to invite(bring) people to church.
- **John 13:34-35** The church gathering provides the place where *people see if you are what you say you are.* Are you 'walking the talk'
  - This command is only relevant if the world sees us together.
  - When they see us being family together
  - When they see us really love one another
  - This is not possible if the church never gathers or if people are not brought into a place where we live out community together.

### • **Position**

- **Luke 17.7-10** The Position of servant is what builds community
  - *Not to show* others what a good servant we are because then we have received our reward
  - *Not to earn brownie points* so that we receive a pat on the back
- Selfless service of one another is what builds community & helps fulfill the purpose God has for His the church

### • **Perspective**

- **1 Peter 2:6-7** c Jesus is our measure
  - Not the world standards
  - Nor any human Standard

- The Standard of Jesus
  - **Philippians 2:3-8 We keep His example before us at all times**