

Session 4: Christ in Me – And the Body of Christ, the Church

Introduction

In previous sessions we already mentioned the church. But what exactly is the church? Why should I go to church? In many places church has become entertainment shows, concerts and platforms to elevate so called pastors, apostles or prophets above all the other church members. And the church members pay for this entertainment in the form of tithes and offerings. But that was not the original idea of God.

Lesson: The Church – the Body of Christ

Lesson Outcome:

- Know what the church is
- Know the purpose of the church
- Know why I should attend a church

4.1 What is the church?

The original and ultimate goal of God for mankind was the establishment of the heavenly Kingdom on earth through his sons.

Colossians 1:24 ²⁴ *Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.*

Here the church is described as the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 ¹² *Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.*

The body of Christ, the church, has many parts. Everyone who has received the Holy Spirit is a part of that body, the church. Paul, the author of the book of the Colossians is willing to suffer for the Christians in Colossae. Are you willing to suffer for the church?

So, the **church** is not a building. The church is people. All people who believe in Jesus as their Messiah, who have received the Holy Spirit form together the body of Christ which is the church.

The **local church** is saved people meeting together in a specific area.

Matthew 16:13-20 ¹³ *When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"*

¹⁴ *They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*

¹⁵ *"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"*

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, **“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”**

¹⁷ Jesus replied, *“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ 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.** ¹⁹ 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.”* ²⁰ Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

“Peter” means “pebble, small stone”. On Peter’s statement God is going to build His church. He is not going to build it on Peter, he is just a pebble. You don’t build a building on pebbles, you build it on a foundation, a big rock. On the statement that Jesus is the Christ, He will build His church. That is why it says that Christ is the foundation (1 Cor 3:11) and he is also the chief cornerstone that keeps the whole building together (Eph 2:20).

1 Corinthians 3:11-13 ¹¹ For no one can lay any **foundation** other than the one already laid, **which is Jesus Christ.** ¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work.

Ephesians 2:19-22 ¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, **with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.** 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.

In Matthew 16:18 we read that “Hades will not overcome it (the church)”.

Hades: the place of the departed spirits, the place of the dead

Gates of Hades: death (you get into hades through death)

Therefore, death will not overcome the church. This means that the church is eternal which makes sense since it is built on Jesus Christ and not human beings. The church should not be afraid of death. It should be fearless.

Hebrews 2:10-18 ¹⁰ In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. ¹¹ Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. ¹² He says,

“I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.”

¹³ And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again he says,

“Here am I, and the children God has given me.”

*¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death **he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil**—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

The Greek word for church is ekklesia. It means “called out ones”, the word comes from the Greek concept of government. Cesar’s cabinet was called ekklesia.

Ekklesia was the name the roman emperor gave to the group of people that he personally chose to be with him. Notice how cabinets are chosen today. Cabinets are never voted in. And that is the word ekklesia. Cabinets are chosen solely by the ruler, the president, the king or the prime minister. The leader chooses the cabinet himself. The leader can reshuffle his cabinet anytime he wants. Which means God may put you in the juristic department one day, keep you there for 3 years and then decide to reshuffle. That normally happens when the cabinet minister does not perform or does not stand behind the leader. If you don’t use your gifts and talents, if you don’t follow His instructions or support his views, God will reshuffle you. The more you work for God, the more God keeps you close in his cabinet.

Jesus didn’t say on this Rock I will build **a** church or **the** church because there are many cabinets. That is why he said **MY** church. On this statement he builds his cabinet. “Cesar has his ekklesia, I have my ekklesia. Cesar is lord, I am Lord. He has his kingdom, I have got my kingdom. His kingdom is of this world, my kingdom is not of this world, but I have got the same setup. And my objective is not only to take over the earth but to take over Cesar’s kingdom so that I will be the king of all the kings.” And God plans to do it through his ekklesia.

The Church is a chosen, appointed, called out group of people just like the roman government cabinet. If you are a born-again believer today, then you are a government official. So you are an honourable ... Behave accordingly.

Ephesians 4:11-13 (NKJV) *¹¹ And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;*

This is what the church is for, to train the saints for the work of their ministry until they come to the full image of the stature of Christ. Until you are completely transformed and become like Christ or as Romans 12 puts it:

Romans 12:1-2 (NLT) *¹ And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. ² Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person*

by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

The church is the legal agency of God on earth

The government of the nation is not the legal agency of God. God established authorities but his agency is the church. What is an agency? An agency is an organisation that services you for someone else. Like insurance agencies. There is a difference between an insurance agency and an insurance company. An agency is a company that is working for another company maybe in Great Britain somewhere. The insurance company is using an agency to service South Africa and you give them your money and they send it back to Great Britain. The agency is in the middle. That is exactly what the church is. The church is not the government of God, it is the agency through which the government works. We service the world for God. So when the world wants to visit God, they shouldn't go direct to heaven, they are supposed to come to the agency. You, sitting on that desk at school, you are supposed to introduce the government to the people in your school, the school becomes your territory to influence. If you are a teacher, you are God's agent to these little students. They should meet God through you.

The church is the administrative arm of God's government on earth

When God wants to heal some people, he sends his administrative to take care of it. You lay hands on the sick, he says and he will raise them up. You lay hands on them, I will raise them up. You are the agency, I am the source. You don't heal nobody, you just set up the situation for me. You put your hands on their head and I will send the resources through you. And the person gets healed. That is why you can't take the glory when a person gets healed, it goes to the government.

The church is heaven's local government. The church is God's administrative department on earth to execute heaven's dictates in this territory.

The church is God's diplomatic core on earth

Diplomacy is our responsibility. We represent heaven on earth.

The church is heaven's earthly National Assembly

When the National Assembly does agree, things become law. God says whatever you agree on earth, heaven will do. No matter how much bills the parliament may pass, may create, they have to send it to the National Assembly and the National Assembly decides if it becomes law. God says, "I have a lot of things I want to do on earth, but I have to send it to the National Assembly first. And when my National Assembly agrees on it, it happens on earth." Even though God wants to bless you, heal you, deliver you, prosper you, he can't do it unless he gets somebody to agree with you.

Matthew 18:18-20 (NLT) ¹⁸ *"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*

¹⁹ *"Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."*

John 14:12-14 (NLT) ¹² *"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. ¹³ You*

can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴ Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!

4.2 The purpose of the church - community

The church is not for your benefit. It is not about:

- What is the church doing for me?
- Did I like the sermon or the worship today?
- Is the church taking care of me?

The goal of the church is to serve as God's **agency** to call man back to their source. What do **diplomats** do? They represent a government. And their job is to represent their government to the place they are in. That is the goal of the church. The goal of the church is to call humans back to God through the secretary of state, Jesus Christ and to restore their heavenly citizenship through the Holy Spirit and thereby establish His kingdom on earth in their presence.

In essence, the church is the means, and the kingdom is the end. Your responsibility is to go out of the government building (church building) and to enter every discipline of life that you work in and to invite citizens back to their original kingdom, so that they can defy death and have life to the full on the earth now.

The mission of the church is to represent the government of God and to serve as ambassadors of heaven recruiting citizens for the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 3:10-11 ¹⁰ *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The church as an organisation does not go to the world but it exists to train the saints to go. The church itself does not go to the world, it trains its agents to go to the world.

So the pastor is not supposed to make alter calls, that should be made at your desk, or at that mechanic job or on the computer talking to somebody, or at lunch talking to somebody. So, the church sends out agents.

Ephesians 4:11-13 ¹¹ *So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

The church prepares you to go, you build up the body. The pastor is a trainer of salespersons.

Ephesians 6:19-20 ¹⁹ *Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

The government is depending on you.

Matthew 5:14-16 ¹⁴ *"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand,*

and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

This passage doesn't talk about you as an individual but about a group, it is plural. All of you together form one light that the world would see your collective good deeds and glorify the father in heaven.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 ¹⁶ *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.*

Not only you as an individual are the temple of God but you all together make one temple of the Holy Spirit. God resides in you as a group.

No one has seen God, but if we collectively get together and love one another (John 13:34-35), then there is a physical manifestation of God on earth. In the Old Testament times, if you wanted to physically see God, where would you go? To the temple, the holy of holies. Now we collectively are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Every one of us individually is part of a larger body, a larger temple to declare His praises. I get to be part of this group that God has called out. This is a privilege.

1 Peter 2:9-10 ⁹ *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. ¹⁰ 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.*

You were on your own, individuals, but now you are the people of God. We are chosen. God picked you as an individual to be part of this group of people. He wants you to be part of it. Together we are a royal priesthood, a holy nation. All of that is plural. God is building something so much bigger than you as an individual. It is about us.

We taught you that you as an individual can be saved from your sin and go to heaven. That is all true but the bible is much bigger than that. It is not about an individual, it is not about one person drawing attention to himself/herself. It's about us as a body working together collectively for something.

Illustration:

Ice skates: if I came over to you one day and gave you a gift. You open it and you are so excited about the ice skates. So you go to the ice rink and fly around on these skates. One day I come back and say: I actually didn't give you the skates for you to just skate around. I want you to be part of our hockey team. We are going to join the NHL and beat them all and dominate the league. And you reply: I didn't know that. I thought you gave me the skates to just skate around, have fun and show off.

That is what we do in church. I received forgiveness. I thought it was just for me, so that I can enjoy eternity in heaven with God. I thought it was just for me. Now you are telling me that I am part of a team, that we work together as a body?! Together we are a royal priesthood, a holy nation and there is purpose. We collectively declare the praises of Him. Our task is to show, to declare God to

the world. We have to do that together. You can't display God by yourself. How do you show God's forgiveness by yourself? You can't!

That is why we forgive each other, that is why we help you with your struggles, your weaknesses, because we are a team and together, we represent, we display, we show God to the world.

1 Corinthians 12:27 ²⁷ *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

God doesn't want you to be isolated! Isolation is the biggest punishment you can get. First, they put you in prison, isolated from the rest of the world. If you still don't behave, they put you in isolation cell. But you are part of a body, a group, chosen by God himself. You are in His team to accomplish His mission of showing God to the rest of the world that they may glorify Him.

4.3 Tithing

The tithe was set up in the Old Testament by God (Leviticus 27:30-34). The purpose of the tithe was

- To fear the Lord God and recognise Him as the provider (Deuteronomy 14:23).
- to support the Levites who did not get a piece of land as their inheritance in the promised land as they are to serve in the temple (Numbers 18:20-21).
- To provide food for certain feasts/celebrations (Deuteronomy 14:24-27).
- To provide for foreigners, widows and orphans (Deuteronomy 14:28-29).

Although it could be substituted with money in certain cases, the tithe was never money but produce of the land. Therefore, the tithe is not to enrich someone or a certain group of people but to feed and nourish the people who do not have or are not able to produce food for themselves.

Tithing has nothing to do with giving God money. God doesn't need anything from you. Everything on earth already belongs to God. He might give you a salary or an income of some sort, but it is all his. Why do I have to give him back? He doesn't need it. When God sets something up, it is not because he needs it. Tithing and offerings is God's **management program** for humankind. God doesn't need a cent from us, though he says 10% of everything is mine. We only think of money and that is our problem. If you have 10 pairs of shoes, one is not yours. If you get 10 dresses, one of them is not yours. If you bought 10 oranges, one of them is not yours. If you have got 24 hours in a day, 2 hours 24 minutes don't belong to you. God could any time of the day command you to give the dress away. One of them is not yours. So tithing and offering is not about money, it is about management. God says, can you consistently set aside 10% of everything for my purposes? That is tithing.

100% of everything belongs to God. So, if God blesses you with R1000, R1000 belong to God.

How much did God say you should put aside for his work? 10%

How much is left? 90%

Which one of those belong to God? Both, all 100%.

Then why does God want you to put aside 10% if still all 100% belong to him? Because it is not about the money, it is about your ability to put it aside, your will, your control, your discipline to put it aside. He is after your discipline. If you can manage the 10% properly, then he is happy to trust you with he 90% that is left. But because you haven't been faithful in the 10%, you keep losing the 90% so you end up with 0%. That is why you are broke.

This is what tithing does to you:

1. Accountability: Each one of these words is management. If you keep paying your tithe and offering, you automatically first become accountable.
2. Discipline: for you to put 10% aside every single time, it takes control.
3. Honesty: no one is watching except God. And he knows if you are paying or not. You can lie to anybody else, but God knows if you are paying 10% or not. That means it makes you honest. And managers must be honest.
4. Diligence: you consistently work at it to make sure that you don't steal that 10%. That is what managers are supposed to do.
5. Faithfulness: that is what is wrong with managers. They are unfaithful.
6. Trustworthiness: for you to manage a tithe, God has to trust you every time.

These are the characteristics of a manager. A manager is accountable, disciplined, honest, diligent, faithful, and trustworthy.

In the New Testament the tithe is not mentioned as such. But generosity and loving each other is. Paul encouraged several churches to collect money to support the impoverished church in Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 8:8-9 (ESV) ⁸ *I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.*

Paul is not commanding the Corinthians to give to the believers in Jerusalem, but in order to prove that their love is real.

⁹ *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*

From the study of scripture, when we look at the New Testament, you are not required to give 10% of your income so that those who give it are relieved that they did it and those who didn't give it feel guilty all the time. You are not required to give a certain amount of your income.

But we have this awesome example in Jesus, who was rich in heaven. And he made himself poor, he made himself nothing so that we all could be rich. We are here today because someone left all of his riches, came down and gave you a pretty awesome life: I am a friend of God. I am an heir of all of his riches. He came down and he sacrificed, and he made me rich. And so, as follower of Christ, that desire should be in us. It is not a command: you have to give. It just proves that the Holy Spirit is in your life as you actually have the same desires as Christ. If that is what He did for me, I want to empty myself and help these other people. Then it's the response of having given your life to God.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 (ESV) ⁶ *The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.* ⁷ *Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

God likes a cheerful giver, one who has this desire to help other people, who can't wait to get to church because they thought through what they are going to give. You want to do it out of love. Not because the more I give the more I get and one day I can build my mansion. No, my desire is to be like Jesus. So, God, please change my heart and make me a giver.

Though tithing was commanded in the Old Testament, the New Testament tells us that we should not neglect the weightier issues. Yes, it's good to offer a portion of our income to God but we should not forget to offer justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23). These should go hand in hand. We can't practice one while neglecting the other.

Proverbs 3:9-10 ⁹ *Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce.*

¹⁰ *Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine.*

Even though tithing isn't required today, it does not mean that believers should hoard their possessions.

To whom are we supposed to give the tithe and offerings? How do we give to God? Matthew 25:37-45 will give you an idea. In the early church people full of the Holy Spirit were selected to distribute food and resources to the widows and orphans in the church (Acts 6:1-4). We are commanded to support those who preach the gospel (Matthew 10:10; Luke 10:7; 1 Corinthians 9:6-14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18). And while we should enjoy the good things God gives us, we are also called to be generous to those in need (1 Timothy 6:17-19; 2 Corinthians 8-9). Give to the church to share with those who do not have.

Wealth can so easily become an idol, leading us to abandon the Lord. With money comes great influence, honour and power in society. It can change a person completely. Some people can spend R2000 on a sick dog but would never spend that amount of money for a human being. The bible says you can't serve God and money (Matthew 6:24). Don't hang your heart on money. To us humans it seems as if one could be secure and without any worries if one had always enough money in the bank. But then your trust is not in God anymore for your daily bread but in your bank account.

Before Jesus left the earth, he gave us a command.

John 13:34-35 (NLT) ³⁴ *So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.* ³⁵ *Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."*

According to John 13, church members, disciples of Jesus Christ should be known for their love for each other.

4.4 Why should I attend a church?

Don't go to church if you don't know why you are going. What is the purpose of going to meet with other believers?

Hebrews 10:25 ²⁵ *And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.*

The bible clearly states that believers should meet together. Here are some benefits of meeting together as children of God:

- I am not on my own. I am part of God's team, the family of God.
- I am built up and encouraged to hold on to the faith.

- My mind is renewed, and my thinking transformed.
- I have a safe practice field for my gifts.
- I can practically love my brothers and sisters.
- I can assist others and get assistance in fulfilling my purpose.
- I can meet God.
- I can get direction and correction for life.
- I am equipped to go into the world as an ambassador of the Kingdom of God.
- What we agree on together, will be done for us. What we as a group lock on earth will be locked in heaven and what we open on earth will be opened in heaven.

Conclusion

The church is a big family of members of equal importance that builds each member up and helps each other reach their potential and make the most of the gifts and talents they have been given by God. Every believer has to play his/her part to receive encouragement and be built up to accomplish his/her calling and also serve, assist and help others fulfil theirs.

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, I don't understand why you have chosen me to be on your team. But I belong to you. You are the first priority in my life. You created me in the likeness of God Almighty to bring Him glory. I am made to strive and to succeed. I do not trust in myself. I do not boast in my abilities or believe in my own strength. I rely only on the power of God. I give my best for the pleasure of my Heavenly Father, the honour of Christ and the reputation of the Holy Spirit. My attitude is beyond reproach and my conduct beyond criticism. I submit to God's authority and those He has put over me no matter whether my emotions are up or down. I respect my leaders, teammates, brothers and sisters out of respect for the Lord. My body is God's temple and I protect it from within and without. Nothing enters my body that does not honour the living God. My sweat is an offering to my Master, my sufferings are a sacrifice to my Saviour. I give my best for my team all the time. I don't give up following Christ. I am His disciple. The result of my efforts must result in His glory.

Amen

Weekly Activity

- Read John 15
- Ask your pastor what the purpose of the church is.
- If you don't attend/belong to a local church, look out for one that teaches the Bible.

