

CHURCH AND MEETINGS

I. What is Church?

"...Church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours." I Corinthians 1:2

"...church which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." Ephesians 1:23

According to the original contents of Bible, the term "church" means "a group of people that have been called out". Church is not a building, or a charitable organization formed by men, but the composition of saints called by Jesus. Through out generations, all the children of God who share the same eternal life of Jesus Christ participate as members of the body of Christ. This spiritual body has the fullness of Christ who fills all in all. When Jesus came to earth in the flesh, God's fullness dwelled in bodily form in Him. When he died on the cross, that fullness was released through His broken body. He was like a grain of wheat that fell to the ground and died. Therefore, many seeds were generated. The release of His fullness has brought forth the expanded fullness, the church.

(A) The vision of church

"Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, ..." Acts 9:1-5

Paul, originally Saul, was on his way to Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him, and he fell to the ground. His outward eyes were blind, but inner eyes were opened to see Christ that was in glory and also it was Jesus whom he was persecuting. Paul persecuted men and women belonging to the Way, and the Lord revealed to him that he was actually persecuting Him. That was the great revelation of the relationship of the Head and the Body. That vision held Paul for the rest of his life and made him no longer care his own life and benefits. He was determined to, on behalf of the church - the body of Christ, fill all the lacking of the sufferings of Christ. That was why he could witness in front of King Agrippa: "I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision." Through out generations, countless number of saints received the same great vision of the church. This is a living vision that holds us closely to follow His footsteps and enables us to proceed on the journey ahead.

(B) The testimony of church

"For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority." Colossians 2:9-10

Church is the body of Christ and the fullness of Christ. Therefore, the glorious Jesus needs to be manifested by church, and that is the testimony of the church. Just as Christ has received the fullness of Deity, the church also receives the fullness in Christ. Just as Christ has manifested the glory of God, the church also has to manifest the glory of Christ. Being saved by grace, we all stand on the foundation of salvation and are a part of the church. We need to strive to pursue the testimony of the church for only true testimony can satisfy God's heart. God's purpose can be obtained only when the glory of Christ is fully manifested in the church.

(C) The building of the church

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:10

Matthew 16 mentions how Peter received the Heavenly Father's revelation and answered Jesus question by saying: "Thou are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The Lord immediately told him the plan of building up the church: "...you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church;..." The "rock" referred here is the Christ of revelation. Wherever Christ is revealed, there is the building of the church. The Lord continued to show them the way of the cross. He told them how he had to suffer, be killed and raised up on the third day. The Lord also told them whoever wanted to follow Him had to deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Him. Only a life that has the revelation and has gone through the work of the cross can truly build up the church. Church is the joint masterpiece of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is the architect and builder of the glorious church.

II. The Importance of Meetings and Types of Various Meetings

"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst." Matthew 18:20

"... not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one and other, and all the more, as you see the day drawing near." Hebrews 10:25

"So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Acts 2:41-42

Gathering or meetings is the natural result from the resurrection of the Lord and the descending of the Holy Spirit. Meetings are the time that saints gather in the Lord's name. Church is gradually built up through fellowship in the Lord in various types of

meetings. The Lord specifically promised in Matthew 18 that when two or three of those who belong to Him gather together in His name, He will be in their midst. Therefore, it is clear that His presence is in the meetings held in His name. Meetings in His presence are the time that we are more enlightened and blessed than being alone. Meetings are also the opportunities that saints can share and make known the blessings received. Church meetings are the manifestation and activities of the body of Christ. No child of God should leave the body of Christ and be a loner. Therefore, His word commands us not to forsake our own assembling together, but to encourage one another to meet.

The primary types of meetings of the church are listed below:

1. Gospel Meeting

- The mission of this meeting is to preach gospel.

"...because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now..."

Philippians 1:5

Gospel meeting is the very first type of meeting in the new testament, either from the recording in four gospel books, or the Book of Acts. The purpose why the Lord set church on earth was not just self-edifying, but also helping more to repent and become part of His church.

- (i) Gospel meeting is an opportunity of serving the Lord for believers: Christians participate in gospel meeting to serve not to listen to a good sermon. We have to come with an attitude to serve and witness to friends. Therefore, we have to pray in the meeting and support the meeting in our spirit the whole time.
- (ii) Bring friends: Gospel meetings are for nonbelievers. Therefore, we have the responsibility to bring friends to it. Just as what Gospel according to Luke describes, we have to force people standing by the road side and fences to attend the King's banquet.
- (iii) Be caring to friends: We are host in the house of God. Therefore, we have to warmly greet new faces and let them feel the love in God's house. Sit next to a new friend and help him or her to find the proper Bible verses or hymns. Pray for them in our heart and encourage them to receive the Lord when the speaker is giving the invitation calling.
- (iv) The importance of what happens after the meeting: Many times gospel friends were shy to answer the invitation calling in the meeting, even though they were very touched by God's love. Also, many times they answered the calling, but we still have to help them to be clear about the salvation and lead them to pray. Therefore, the time after the meeting is critically important, and it is also our opportunity to preach the gospel individually. This period of time is usually regarded as the peak of the gospel meeting.

2. Message Meeting

- The growth and building of the church

"On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord."

Acts 13:44

We need God's word to build up the church and make it grow. Therefore, we need to pray for spiritual food for the house of God. Ask for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we may truly know Him. When we come to the meeting, we need to open our heart with an longing attitude, not with a spirit of criticism. The success of a message partially depends on the speaker, and partially on us listeners. Our longing will draw out the Lord's word, and our open heart will greatly help the speaker.

3. Fellowship Meeting

- This meeting measures the stature of spiritual life of saints.

"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. " I Corinthians 14:26

Fellowship means to have communication that results in unity. Since we have the same kind of life, the eternal life, we can communicate in that life. Also, God has given different gifts to us, so we can apply them in a fellowship meeting. In the verse quoted above, it indicates that everyone "has" something from God to offer in a gathering. We are responsible to share or to give what God has given to us for His church. However, the application of gifts has to be done naturally, not reluctantly, or by imitating others. Therefore, it is important that we prepare ourselves on the regular basis by waiting on the Lord and seeking His guidance. We must first receive it from the Lord before we share with others in the meeting. If we all learn to do so, the meeting will be spiritually full and edifying.

4. Breaking of Bread Meeting

- This meeting reveals saints' relationship with the Lord.

"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." I Corinthians 23-26

The Lord Jesus personally set up this meeting on the very night he was betrayed. It was at the last supper of Passover with His disciples. When God led Israelites out the land of Egypt, he told them to observe Passover from that time on in order to remember

how God deliver them through the death of lambs. That lamb represented Jesus, the Son of God who gave His life for the world. On that night since Jesus was about to accomplish the salvation as the lamb of the Passover, and make a new covenant in His blood, He told them to break the bread and drink the cup in remembrance of Him until He returns. Therefore, church no longer has to observe Passover, but have breaking of bread meetings regularly.

(i) The bread blessed by the Lord - to remember His broken body

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'" Matthew 26:26

The bread on the table represents the Lord's body. He gave himself as ransom for many. Through the death on the cross, He broke His body and allow us to partake in this life.

(ii) The cup blessed by the Lord - to remember the blessings of the new covenant.

"Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" Matthew 26:27-28

The grape wine in the cup represents the blood shed by our Lord on the cross. He shed His blood for us for the forgiveness of sins. With the cup, He made a new covenant which brings for us forgiveness and abundance in God.

(iii) The Lord's table - The testimony of the body of Christ.

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. "
I Corinthians 10:16-17

The breaking of bread meeting also offer the opportunity for saints to fellowship. In that fellowship we remember what the Lord has done and worship Him together. All the children of God are part of the bread as a member of His body. Therefore, when we attend the breaking of bread meeting, not only we come and fellowship with the Lord, but also with one another.

5. Prayer Meeting - This meeting measures saints' burden for God's work.

"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. for where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."
Matthew 18:19-20

- (i) Meeting in the Lord's name - The Lord is the center of the meeting, so we should make sure that He is satisfied first. Every meeting held in the name of the Lord is entitled to the fullness of what He is and what He has done. His name is the name above all names as said in Philippians chapter two. God gave the name Jesus to His beloved Son, now Jesus has given us His great name. Therefore, when we gather in the Lord's name, His presence will be with us. When we pray in His name, He will listen.

- (ii) In one accord - The first requirement of a prayer meeting is to have one accord. We have to learn to pray to a point that harmony and one accord are among us.. The purpose of our prayer is to accomplish God's purpose, not to change it. Therefore, when we wait on Him and gradually understand His purpose and pray in one accord, God will achieve it for us.

- (iii) Be true, sincere, short, and continuous in our prayer - Prayer has to be true, not eloquent. The key is that it has to be accepted by God. A true prayer can be achieved by having a genuine desire to know the Lord's purpose and earnestly pray for it. We not only should have true and earnest prayer, but also short prayer. Otherwise, our sincere prayer may be distracted by other unnecessary words. Also, in a prayer meeting, we need to learn to concentrate on individual goal/purpose. Pray for one goal or purpose first. Do not switch to the next goal until we feel that we have prayed through for the first one. In this way, Holy Spirit can move very smoothly.