

WHAT IS CHURCH?

Tanya Goffin

Somewhere to believe, behave and belong

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20 NLT)

"You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor.

And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. As the Scriptures say,

"I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem, chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced."

Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him. But for those who reject him, "The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone."

And, "He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them.

But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

"Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy."

Dear friends, I warn you as "temporary residents and foreigners" to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world." (1 Peter 2:4-12 NLT)

The importance of local church

"God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord. Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence." (Ephesians 3:10-12 NLT)

"Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-13 NLT)

- God's plan
- Place of God's blessings
- Accountability
- Protection
- Integrity

The real church (vs. religious institutions)

- Bible-believing and Spirit filled
- Victorious

"Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven." (Matthew 16:18-19 NLT)

- Focussed on evangelism with correct priorities: local and world

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8 NLT)

- Inclusive (rejects cliques) and restorative

"Afterward I will return and restore the fallen house of David. I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord, including the Gentiles—all those I have called to be mine. The Lord has spoken—he who made these things known so long ago." (Acts 15:16-18 NLT)

"So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit." (Ephesians 2:19-22 NLT)

Characteristics of a local church (a taste of Heaven)

"All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 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—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved." (Acts 2:42-47 NLT)

Not perfect! (see Acts 6, 7,15)

- Follow the teaching of your church leaders (apostles' teaching, based on the Word).
Be careful who else you listen to!
- Cultivating fellowship and relationships, especially with people outside of your comfort zone
- Sharing communion (the Lord's supper)
- Prayer
- A real sense of awe for God, the 'fear of the Lord' (respect)
- Miraculous works of the Holy Spirit
- Generosity, meeting needs of others in the church
- Worshipping together
- Meeting in people's homes, socially and small groups
- A shared sense of joy in the Lord
- The church growing in number primarily through those being saved
- Having a positive impact in the local community

Some 'tips'

- Talk to people
- If possible stay after church for fellowship
- Serve wherever you can ('it is more blessed to give than receive')
- Support our pastors
- Help others where you can (AOK, etc.)
- Get to know and love your neighbours / work colleagues
- Pray! Enjoy being in the presence of the Lord—be a 'Mary' before becoming a 'Martha'

In summary, our church is God's plan to showcase His answer to the world (full of conflict, anxiety and hate) — a group of people united by their identity in Christ, their love for Christ and their love for each other.