
EQUIP

**What is the Church – Small Group Session One
Week beginning 29th January**



What is the Church?

The heart of EQUIP is all about reflecting on a few simple truths and allowing them to deeply impact and shape our lives. We have already thought about the heart of human history - from creation to new creation. We have considered the heart of salvation - what is a Christian? We are now turning to think about our community - what is the church?

The word 'church' in the New Testament is the Greek work 'ekklesia' and it just means a gathering of people. In the New Testament it describes all sorts of gatherings. Have a look at Acts 19:32 and you will see the word 'ekklesia' describes the gathering (assembly) of a mob that is rioting! In Acts 19:39 the word church (ekklesia) describes the gathering of officials in court (a legal assembly). Our translations use the word 'assembly' because for us church has become a uniquely Christian, but the word 'church' just means gathering.

Now if the very word 'church' means gathering, it is impossible to be part of a church unless you gather with others! Simply watching a talk on a DVD or a service on YouTube might help you grow individually, but it is not what it means to be part of a church. In fact we are just about to see you can't be a Christian unless you are part of the church!

Well then, what makes church gatherings different from any other gatherings of people? What should it look like when we gather for church? Why can't you be a Christian and not be part of the church?... these are the questions for this week. To understand this, we need to look a bit deeper at the two churches in the Bible. Maybe start the session by praying together. Ask God to define or re-define what the church is and to show us what our churches should be built around.

If you want a question to start you thinking before opening up the Bible, have a think about what makes a church a church - how would you define it? What are the essential elements in any church life?

"But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God,
the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon
thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the
firstborn, whose names are written in heaven."

Hebrews 12:22-23

Christ's Church

1 Two Churches in the Bible

In the Bible there are two churches, an Old Testament Church and a New Testament Church. We are told about the Old Church when God's people gather at Mount Sinai. The New Church is just as real, but we can't see it; it is heavenly and happening now. Read Hebrews 12:18-24.

Time for a list. What is similar about both churches and what makes them different?

How might the things in the list help define church for us?

We don't normally think of our church like this but we are already a part of the 'one, holy catholic and apostolic Church' (to quote the creed). Catholic just means universal. What differences might it make if we saw church this way?

2 Listen to the One who speaks

Both churches gather to listen to God as he speaks. In the Old Testament Church the people longed that God would stop speaking. Now, in the Heavenly Church, we gather round Jesus who speaks a better word of his saving blood of the gospel.

According to verse 25, how should we respond having compared these two churches? How might that motivate us?

3 Our Local Church

If the church is a gathering of all Jesus's people (round Jesus, listening to His word of the gospel and not refusing it) then our Local Churches are just 'here and now' physical expressions of that eternal reality. When we gather as Christians (20r3 or 20r3 thousand) we are to reflect that reality. We gather as Jesus' people to listen to Jesus' word of the gospel and, when we do, Jesus is with us by His Spirit.

In what ways do we put the word of the God at the centre of our gatherings in our church? What other things does church culture suggest we should have as equal or greater priorities? In what ways might we better listen to Jesus' word when we meet in different ways?

Time to pray, that we would see the Church as it really is and be the Church that Jesus really wants us to be.

