



What is a church?



Question - What is a church?

It is an amazing truth that if you have been saved by God, by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then *you* are one of God's people. God's people are called the 'body of Christ' and '**the Church**'. You have been redeemed by Christ himself, the head of the church.

The body of Christ, the church, is international! It includes people from every tribe, language, people and nation on earth. God's great purpose and plan, through all human history, and for all eternity, is that his people will reign with him forever. *"To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen."* (1 Timothy 1:17, Colossians 1:18, Revelation 5:9-10).

If you are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, then God wants you to meet together with other Christians, as a *visible local community of people committed to each other*. This is the **local church**, through whom God wants his love, his glory and his greatness to be made known. Most of the time when Scripture talks about the church it is talking about this visible local community of committed people.

It is important to realise that a church is not a religious building! It is not a national or international organisation run by senior religious leaders! It is not a social construct thought up by people. It is not just a preaching centre to which people may travel! A local church is more important and glorious than any of those things!

God created and designed the visible local church. This booklet explains God's purpose and design, as taught in the scriptures.

The first English translation of the Bible was smuggled into England by William Tyndale in 1526. Though an illegal book it was enormously popular. The Greek word ekklesia (church) was translated as 'congregation' - a meeting of people.

Scripture teaches us that -

A local church is a community of believers, saved by God through faith in Jesus Christ, who meet and commit to each other and the leaders, for the purpose of worship, learning from the Holy Scriptures, loving relationships, service and telling others, out of love and gratitude to God and for his glory.

The Christian church was founded as a result of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The first century church in Jerusalem - the visible local community of believers who met together and were committed to each other - are first described in the book of Acts.

"they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." Acts 2:42,46,47

Thought: Have you considered the purpose of the local church?

The rest of this booklet explains what the scriptures say about the local church and what that means for you.

From the jungle of Papua New Guinea to NY Manhattan to the prison camps of North Korea, jihadist torn Syria and Iraq, secret locations in Saudi Arabia, in Chinese high rise flats, persecuted northern Nigerian villages, or the noisy cities of the world - in all these places you will find local churches who meet and commit to each other and the leaders, for worship, learning, loving relationships, service and telling others the good news out of love and gratitude to God and for his glory.

1

Who is a believer?

A local church is **a community of believers, saved by God through faith in Jesus Christ**, who meet and commit to each other and the leaders, for the purpose of worship, learning from the Holy Scriptures, loving relationships, service and telling others, out of love and gratitude to God and for his glory.

Who belongs to a church?

People who are saved by God, by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, people who have become real Christians.

You are not born a Christian. You are not a Christian because your parents are Christians. You are not a Christian because you have been baptised or attend church. You are not a Christian because you believe in the teaching of Jesus. Millions have done these things and yet care nothing about Christ and know nothing of a changed life within.

You do not become a Christian by living a good life!

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" Ephesians 2:8

*O GREAT GOD OF HIGHEST HEAVEN,
occupy my lowly heart.
Own it all and reign supreme,
conquer every rebel power.
Let no vice or sin remain
that resists your holy war.
You have loved and purchased me,
make me yours forever more.*

*2. I was blinded by my sin,
had no ears to hear your voice,
did not know your love within,
had no taste for heaven's joys.
Then your Spirit gave me life,
opened up your word to me
through the gospel of your Son,
gave me endless hope and peace.*

*3. Help me now to live a life
that's dependent on your grace.
Keep my heart and guard my soul
from the evils that I face.
You are worthy to be praised
with my every thought and deed.
O great God of highest heaven,
glorify your name through me.*

*You are worthy to be praised
with my every thought and deed.
O great God of highest heaven,
glorify your name through me.*

- Bob Kauflin

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What is a real Christian?

You become a Christian, firstly, through a work of God the Holy Spirit in your heart. You make a conscious choice to **turn from your sins** - that is what is meant by repentance (see Ephesians 2:1-10; Acts 20:21). "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Isaiah 55:7

Secondly, to become a real Christian you must **trust in Jesus Christ alone as your Saviour**; trust in who he is and what he did on the cross. Faith is putting your trust in Jesus Christ, believing that he is the Son of God, who paid the penalty of your sins on Calvary's cross by his blood, to save you from your rightful judgement in hell. And it is believing that he was buried, and was raised to life on the third day, to show that it is true. (Ephesians 2:1-10; 1 Peter 1:18-21) "what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" Acts 16:31

When you repent of your sins and trust in Christ alone you receive new life by the Spirit of God; you are saved from God's judgement and born again by the Spirit of God.

*"Just as I am,
without one plea,
But that Thy blood
was shed for me,
And that Thou bid'st
me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God,
I come! I come!"*
Charlotte Elliott

*"Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson
stain,
He washed it white
as snow."*
Elvina Hall

Thought: Are you born again? Have you become a follower of Christ?

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.. ... That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." John 3:3, 6.

"if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Romans 10:9

How do I know if I am a real Christian?

God wants you to know the joy and peace that comes from being saved through faith in Jesus Christ. But how do you know if you are saved and born again? The scriptures says there will be evidence. There will be evidence that our life has been changed by God.

How do you know if a plant is alive?

When you see fruit its proof that it is alive! How do you know a car engine is working? You listen and examine how it drives! How do you know you have spiritual life, that you are born again by God's Spirit? You will see the following evidence in your life:

1) You will be trusting in Christ's work on the cross alone and God's promises of forgiveness, and not relying on your own good efforts, what other people say, or even your 'good' feelings (2 Timothy 3v15).

2) You will be deeply ashamed of your sins because they offend God and will have a repentant heart (Psalm 51) that turns away from sin.

Are you saved?

Is Jesus Christ your Lord?

If not, find a quiet place and in simple trust in God's promises in the Bible, ask God to forgive you. Tell him about the sins you are turning from. Thank him for dying on the cross. Ask him to be your Saviour and Lord.

- 3) You will have a desire to talk to God (pray) and a hunger to feed on his Word, the scriptures. (Acts 2v42)
- 4) You will want to obey and follow the Lord Jesus Christ out of love for him (Acts 2v46-47). By God's power you will become a new person.
- 5) You will have the peace of God, by his Spirit. (Acts 2v41-47)

Feelings may come and go but our trust is in the Lord (Psalm 32:7).

"if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

2 Corinthians 5:17

"no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit." 1 Corinthians 12:3

"Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you're not saved yourself, be sure of that!"

— Charles Spurgeon

Thought: Is there evidence in your life that you are a real Christian?

How can I grow as a Christian?

You should remember it is only because of Jesus (his death and resurrection) that you are forgiven and made right with God. And it is only by the Spirit's power you can grow as a Christian. That is why the Bible talks about a Christian's identity as 'in Christ'.



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"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20

- You grow in Christ when daily in prayer you Adore, Confess, Thank God, and bring your Supplications to him (Philippians 4:6-7).
- You grow in Christ when you hear, read, study, memorise, meditate on, share and sing the scriptures and then obey what God says (John 14:21, Timothy 3:16, Romans 12:1).
- You grow in Christ when you practice loving relationships with other believers (Hebrews 10:24-25), when you seek to serve others.
- You grow in Christ when you tell others about Christ (Matthew 4:19)
- You grow in Christ when you are baptised as a public confession of a new life following Christ.

*Praying and sinning
will never live together
in the same heart.
Prayer will consume
sin, or sin will choke
prayer.”
— J.C. Ryle,
A Call to Prayer*

Thought: Are you growing as a Christian?

2

Why is it important to belong?

A local church is a community of believers, saved by God through faith in Jesus Christ, **who meet and commit to each other** and the leaders, for the purpose of worship, learning from the Holy Scriptures, loving relationships, service and telling others, out of love and gratitude to God and for his glory.

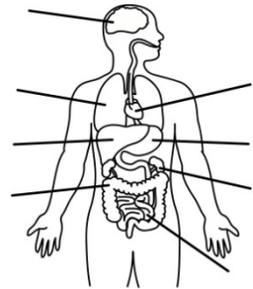
God never intends a Christian to live the Christian life as an isolated individual. A local church of believers are a community committed to each other, so they **"though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."** Romans 12:5 (Ephesians 4:25)

When God describes the local visible church he chooses illustrations that show that the people are committed as members one of another: a building, a body, and a family.

The **building** illustration describes members of a church - "in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." Ephesians 2:21-22. Just as bricks, joists, lintels etc are firmly joined and cemented together in an orderly and beautiful way, so the Lord calls his people to be committed as members one of another (see 1 Timothy 3:15).



The **body** illustration shows that a local church is like a human body. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ." 1 Corinthians 12:12. A local church is not simply a collection of individual believers but 'members one of another', organically connected, each part different yet with a role (see Ephesians 4:15).



The **family/household** illustration shows that a local church is like a family household. "for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?" 1 Timothy 3:5 With a family household you are either a member (inside) - even if you are a rebel, or not a member (outside) - even if you are a very welcome friend!



Other scriptures also show that a local church community has a visible and committed membership (see the word insiders/outsidiers in

1 Corinthians 5:4-6, 12-13; the same teaching in Matthew 18v17-18 and lists of the names of committed people throughout scripture).

We live in a fragmented society driven by individual wants. But God wants us to have covenant (promise based) relationships, rather than just casual relationships: between God and us, between a man and a woman in marriage, between people in employment and business, and between members of the local body of Christ - the church.

The purpose of a visible covenant relationship with the local church, as commanded and illustrated in the New Testament, is as follows:

- To express clear unambiguous love and commitment to one another.
- To express commitment to gospel truth and life
- To organise serving others.

Who can belong to Christ the Word church, Wixams? Anyone who:

1. Has been saved by God through faith in Jesus Christ
2. Publicly confesses their faith by baptism (Acts 8:12)
3. Believes the truths of the gospel (see section 8 'This we believe')
4. Shows evidence of a new life in Jesus Christ and by the way they live in their family, employment and the community, as the scriptures show us.
5. Respects the teaching and leadership of Christ the Word.

Thought: Will I identify and work with others, as Jesus Christ showed me?

3 What kind of leaders?

A local church is a community of believers, saved by God through faith in Jesus Christ, who meet and commit to each other **and the leaders**, for the purpose of worship, learning from the Holy Scriptures, loving relationships, service and telling others, out of love and gratitude to God and for his glory.

The scriptures teach that a church leader should shepherd a church in four ways: teach, care, seek the lost and protect from false teachers. They need to lead by teaching and by example (2 Tim. 4:2, 1 Timothy 4:12).

This is what the apostle Paul tells church leaders - "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ ... I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not

*The covenant prayer of John Wesley for Christian leaders:
I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,
exalted for you, or brought low for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen.
John Wesley*

*"They never shrunk from declaring, in plainest terms, the certainty of God's judgment and of wrath to come, if men persisted in impenitence and unbelief; and yet they never ceased to magnify the riches of God's kindness and compassion, and to entreat all sinners to repent and turn to God before it was too late."
- J C Ryle, 18th century leaders*

sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears." Acts 20:20-21, 27-30.

One teaching aim will be "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" Ephesians 4:12.

Church leaders need to be people who have a love for the Lord Jesus, a love for God's Word, a love for God's people, a love for the lost, a desire to serve, a maturing character, a teachable spirit, a stability in relationships, a giftedness for the task, an evidence of God's blessing, grace, grit and gumption. (Trevor Archer, Paul Mallard, FIEC)

4

What is the purpose of a church?

A local church is a community of believers, saved by God through faith in Jesus Christ, who meet and commit to each other and the leaders, **for the purpose of worship, learning from the Holy Scriptures, loving relationships, service and telling others**, out of love and gratitude to God and for his glory.

God's plan for every person who has been saved is for them to be committed to a local church community.

The Scriptures show that a church has five purposes:

1. Worshiping God
2. Learning from the Holy Scriptures
3. Loving relationships
4. Serving others
5. Telling others the good news of Jesus

1. Worshipping God

Worship is the giving of glory, praise, honour and submissive adoration to God. Firstly, we should offer this, together with others, with our heart as well as our words in prayer, praise, thanksgiving and joyful repentance. Listening to the Word of God should be central in our worship (see Colossians 3:16). Worship is spiritual not aesthetic, rational not ecstatic, reverent not flippant, by words not sounds and smells. Secondly, every part of our lives should be lived as worship, with the aim of honouring God.

*"WORSHIP is loving God. Worship is honouring God. Worship is knowing God for who He is, adoring Him, obeying Him, proclaiming Him as a way of life."
- John MacArthur*

*"You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve"
Matthew 4:10*

"But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:23-24

"falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you" 1 Corinthians 14:25

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Romans 12:1

Thought: Do I worship God in my heart, and with my words and life?

2. Learning from the Holy Scriptures

A church should be a learning church - learning from the scriptures. The last command Jesus gave his followers was about the importance of teaching people "to observe all that I have commanded you" Matt 28v20. Paul the apostle said "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" Acts 20:27. Therefore, explaining and applying God's Word to our life should be central in what a church does. The Word of God should be our 'very life' (Deuteronomy 32:47).

Words of Holy Scripture should be read, searched, thought about, memorised, spoken, discussed, prayed, sung and shared with others every day.

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness"
2 Timothy 3:16

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." Colossians 3:16

*"The revealed Word awakened me, but it was the preached Word that saved me, and I must ever attach peculiar value to the hearing of the truth, for by it I received the joy and peace in which my soul delights."
- C H Spurgeon*

*"Next to praying there is nothing so important in practical religion as Bible reading. By reading that book we may learn what to believe, what to be, and what to do; how to live with comfort, and how to die in peace."
- J C Ryle*

Thought: Do I think about at least one verse of Scripture every day?

The Scriptures alone provide a true knowledge of salvation and a worldview that makes complete sense of our identity, purpose and the world around us. In section 7 below, we outline how learning and trusting gospel truth from scripture saves us, gives us stability and health, guards us and gives us unity.

3. Loving relationships

A church fellowship should possess mutual, affectionate and caring love.

The Lord Jesus said

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" John 13:34-35

Love for our fellow believers is one of the proofs of new life in Christ and it is essential for pleasing the Lord. We must have 'brotherly love'. Jesus great prayer was "that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." John 17:21. Loving relationships are designed to reflect and witness to the reality and character of the triune God - Father , Son and Holy Spirit - for God is love.

A local church is a family. The greatest quality of a family is love. That is why the scriptures instructs us to: encourage one another (Hebrews 10:25), forgive one another (Colossians 3:13), accept one another (Romans 15:7), confess our sins to one another (James 5:16), be

*"When a Christian shuns fellowship with other Christians, the devil smiles. When he stops studying the Bible, the devil laughs. When he stops praying, the devil shouts for joy."
- Corrie Ten Boom*

patient with each other (1 Thessalonians 5:14), rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15), contribute to needs (Romans 12:13), be kind to one another (Ephesians 4:32), serve one another (Galatians 5:13), pray for one another (James 5:16), practice hospitality (Romans 12:13), honour one another (Romans 12:10), not to speak evil of one another (James 4:11), not to judge one another (Romans 14:13), not to lie to one another (Colossians 3:9), not to provoke and envy each other (Galatians 5:26).

Thought: Do I practice 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 ?

4. Serving others

Everyone in a church should be looking out for opportunities for serving others and works of mercy, out of love for Jesus Christ.



Jesus said "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:16. "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." Mark 12:31

A working church is where there is spiritual growth and joy - "the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" Ephesians 4:16

'The absence of Christian service eventually leads to an introspective, self-preoccupied, spiritually unfulfilled people, dependent for happiness on self-indulgence in the secular aspects of life' (Peter Masters, 'Do we have a Policy').

Thought: Am I serving others?

Our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ "gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." Titus 2:13-14

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." Hebrews 10:24-25

Paul the apostle said "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain." 1 Corinthians 15:58

5. Telling others the good news of Jesus

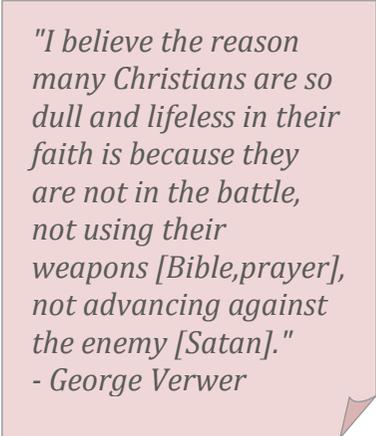
Jesus said "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20. And he said "you will be my witnesses" Acts 1:8.

*"If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him."
- C T Studd*

*"Let us not glide through this world and then slip quietly into heaven, without having blown the trumpet loud and long for our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Let us see to it that the devil will hold a thanksgiving service in hell, when he gets the news of our departure from the field of battle."
- C T Studd*

Down the centuries God's people have taken the good news to other people - "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. This should be by the local visible church publically proclaiming God's Word and gospel truth (Romans 10:14-17; Acts 13:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-9) and individually talking to neighbours, friends and family about the Lord Jesus Christ. The scriptures tell us how - "in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" 1 Peter 3:15

How you live (serving others) is important. It says of Christ's mission strategy that he "**dwelt among us**" and people could **see** he was "full of grace and truth" John 1:14. You live in a fractured and lonely society, desperate to experience and see real loving relationships. People need to see this in you. People who are saved need to be where others are. There are no shortcuts. This will affect where you live and you may need to move house. As bridges are built with people and trust gained by the way Christians live, Christians will be able to tell others about Jesus and bring them to hear God's word. This is what Andrew did (John 1:35, 6:8, 12:22). Generally, people do not respond to publicity. They do respond to personal invitations based on relationships of love and trust. The saying 'people don't come, they are brought' is generally true.



"I believe the reason many Christians are so dull and lifeless in their faith is because they are not in the battle, not using their weapons [Bible, prayer], not advancing against the enemy [Satan]."
- George Verwer

Thought: Do others see love in me? Do I share the good news?

Those who are saved need to be obedient to the Lord's commission. With this vision, Christ the Word church service, Wixams Sunday Club, Ignite club, Holiday Clubs, and adult Bible studies have been started.

5 What is the motivation?

A local church is a community of believers, saved by God through faith in Jesus Christ, who meet and commit to each other and the leaders, for the purpose of worship, learning from the Holy Scriptures, loving relationships, service and telling others, **out of love and gratitude to God** and for his glory.

Life is very short. It will soon be past! And then eternity worshipping the Saviour. Our sadness before the tears are wiped away will be that we did so little and had so little courage to take the commands of Christ more seriously. In Joshua 1:9 the Lord says to Joshua **"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."** In the same way, we should believe, obey and go, relying on the Lord.

"I have lost my reputation for thirty years, ever since i went to preach out of doors, and have neither hope nor wish to retrieve it ... Opinions of me are various; some call me an Independent, some a Baptist, some an Arminian. Indeed, sir, I am nothing, and Jesus, precious Jesus is my all."

Letter by John Berridge, 1788 (The Letters of John Berridge p432)

Our greatest happiness is not defined by where we live, our house, our job, our car or even by another person! Our greatest happiness is when we die to self, recognise how impossible the Christian life is in our own power, yet are obedient in

the power that God gives by his Spirit. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" Galatians 2:20.

6 | What is the ultimate reason?

A local church is a community of believers, saved by God through faith in Jesus Christ, who meet and commit to each other and the leaders, for the purpose of worship, learning from the Holy Scriptures, loving relationships, service and telling others, out of love and gratitude to God and **for his glory**.

Everything we do should be for the praise and glory of God. That is why the universe was made, why we were created. "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31

Jesus Christ cares for the church of God because he obtained the church with his own blood (Acts 20:28) and the church exists to glorify God - "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think,

"Will you not this day make it your prayer? "Lord, help me to glorify Thee; I am poor, help me to glorify Thee by contentment; I am sick, help me to give Thee honour by patience; I have talents, help me to extol Thee by spending them for Thee; I have time, Lord, help me to redeem it, that I may serve Thee; I have a heart to feel, Lord, let that heart feel no love but Thine, and glow with no flame but affection for Thee; I have a head to think, Lord, help me to think of Thee and for Thee; Thou hast put me in this world for something, Lord, show me what that is, and help me to work out my life-purpose."
— Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*

according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." Ephesians 3:20-21

There is a day coming when every born again believer will forever and ever praise God and glorify Christ. "Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!" Revelation 5:11-13

The visible local community approach does raise practical issues: Where exactly to live? Isn't Wixams expensive? Will I be any good at this approach? What if I am not very good at building relationships?

The basic answer to all these questions is the following: God does guide, he does provide, he does open doors, he does help us to overcome the giants of fear and inadequacies we all feel in our lives and he does bless the willing hearts of those who are dependent on Him. 'Sacrifices' of our own comforts are put into a right perspective.

We see these truths time and again through the scriptures, as well as church history, as people step out in faith, trusting God. Typically pioneer missionaries live amongst the people they are reaching. Yet in the West all too often we think we can do 'church' and 'outreach' by commuting - without thinking. We have become detached from people. Real love says "Here am I! Send me" Isaiah 6:8

7 |

Why bother with beliefs?

Does it really matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere? Yes, it certainly does! Why do we need to be *precise* about gospel truth? Why do we need to study the Scriptures? There are five important reasons why gospel truth beliefs are important (the following is based on 'Evangelical Belief', IVP, 1988):

1. Truth alone saves us
2. Gives us Stability
3. Gives us Health
4. Guards us from Danger
5. Gives us Unity

1) Truth alone saves us

The preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones told a group of students "What you must be clear about is that you are lost and damned, hopeless and helpless, and that nothing can save you but the grace of God in Jesus Christ and only Him crucified, bearing the punishment of your sins, dying, rising again, ascending, sending the Spirit, regeneration. Those are the essentials." ('What is an Evangelical?' IFES Conference 1971).



People are saved by hearing a clear and faithful message, using *words*. "You have the words of eternal life" John 6:68. "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." Acts 5:20. (And it is a historical mistake to suggest that Francis of Assisi would have said 'Preach the Gospel always, and *if necessary*, use words.')

Vague ideas do not save anyone. It is the truth that sets you free! See 1 Corinthians 1:23, 1 Corinthians 15:3.

2) Gives us Stability

Truth about the Good News strengthens us against what Paul calls 'every wind of doctrine' Ephesians 4:14. Imagine a gigantic horse chestnut tree. In the summer it is a vast green mass; only leaves are visible. But in winter you see a skeleton of bare branches and you can see what holds all the leaves together. Without that framework it would be just a heap of leaves blown away by the first breeze. In the same way, truth about the Good News is a true narrative to interpret the world in which we live. Gospel truth gives us stability and prevents us being blown around to follow every new fad and fashion: **"so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes" Ephesians 4:14**



3) Gives us Health

To be spiritually healthy and useful to God and the world, we need to feed on the nourishing diet that apostolic doctrine gives us, from the Scriptures. We feed on the Scriptures by reading, thinking, discussing, asking questions, listening to the exposition of Scripture and obeying what it says. We need to pray to God to help us. We should be under no illusions: ignorance, vagueness and confusion are spiritually unhealthy! **"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for**



teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" 2 Timothy 3:16-17

4) Guards us from Danger

The New Testament repeatedly warns us to watch out for false ideas and false teachers that contradict gospel truth - "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears." Acts 20:29-31. When you know truth it is easy to spot false ideas - and unfortunately there are plenty around. Do not listen to them!



5) Gives us Unity

Gospel truth and clarity, centred on the triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - and Jesus' redeeming death on the cross, creates true unity only when it is at the centre of people's worship, learning, loving relationships, serving others and telling others. "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Acts 2:42



8 | This we believe

We whole-heartedly believe and embrace this statement of truths of historic biblical Christianity clearly taught by the Bible. (The Basis of Faith of The Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches - fiec.org.uk/about-us/beliefs)

1. GOD

There is one God, who exists eternally in three distinct but equal persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is unchangeable in his holiness, justice, wisdom and love. He is the almighty Creator; Saviour and Judge who sustains and governs all things according to his sovereign will for his own glory.

2. HOLY SCRIPTURES

God has revealed himself in the Bible, which consists of the Old and New Testaments alone. Every word was inspired by God through human authors, so that the Scriptures as originally given is in its entirety the Word of God, without error and fully reliable in fact and doctrine. The Bible alone speaks with final authority and is always sufficient for all matters of belief and practice.

3. THE HUMAN RACE

All men and women, being created in the image of God, have inherent and equal dignity and worth. Their greatest purpose is to obey, worship and love God. As a result of the fall of our first parents, every aspect of human nature has been corrupted and all men and women are without spiritual life, guilty sinners and hostile to God. Every person is therefore under the just condemnation of God and needs to be born again, forgiven and reconciled to God in order to know and please him.

4. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

The Lord Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, and lived a sinless life in obedience to the Father. He taught with authority and all his words are true. On the cross he died in the place of sinners, bearing God's punishment for their sin, redeeming them by his blood. He rose from the dead and in his resurrection body ascended into heaven where he is exalted as Lord of all. He intercedes for his people in the presence of the Father.

5. SALVATION

Salvation is entirely a work of God's grace and cannot be earned or deserved. It has been accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ and is offered to all in the gospel. God in his love forgives sinners whom he calls, granting them repentance and faith. All who believe in Christ are justified by faith alone, adopted into the family of God and receive eternal life.

6. THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit has been sent from heaven to glorify Christ and to apply his work of salvation. He convicts sinners, imparts spiritual life and gives a true understanding of the Scriptures. He indwells all believers, brings assurance of salvation and produces increasing likeness to Christ. He builds up the Church and empowers its members for worship, service and mission.

7. THE CHURCH

The universal Church is the body of which Christ is the head and to which all who are saved belong. It is made visible in local churches, which are congregations of believers who are committed to each other for the worship of God, the preaching of the Word, the administering of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; for pastoral care and discipline, and

for evangelism. The unity of the body of Christ is expressed within and between churches by mutual love, care and encouragement. True fellowship between churches exists only where they are faithful to the gospel.

8. BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

Baptism and the Lord's Supper have been given to the churches by Christ as visible signs of the gospel. Baptism is a symbol of union with Christ and entry into his Church but does not impart spiritual life. The Lord's Supper is a commemoration of Christ's sacrifice offered once for all and involves no change in the bread and wine. All its blessings are received by faith.

9. THE FUTURE

The Lord Jesus Christ will return in glory. He will raise the dead and judge the world in righteousness. The wicked will be sent to eternal punishment and the righteous will be welcomed into a life of eternal joy in fellowship with God. God will make all things new and will be glorified forever.



Further helpful guidance

- 'Do We Have a Policy? Paul's Ten Point Policy for Church Health and Growth', Peter Masters, Wakeman, 2002
- 'Church Membership', Peter Masters, Wakeman, 1981
- 'Gospel DNA', Richard Coekin, The Good Book Company, 2017
- 'Pure Church', David Skull et al, Grace Publications, 2018
- www.9marks.org
- 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith

Please do contact us if you have any questions or comments about the questions in this booklet, or about the Christian life.

- Alan Pibworth, Chris Clarke, Christ the Word, Wixams.

What is a church?

1. Who is a believer?
2. Why is it important to belong?
3. What kind of leaders?
4. What is the purpose of a church?
5. What is the motivation?
6. What is the ultimate reason?
7. Why bother with beliefs?
8. This we believe
9. Further helpful guidance



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