

# THE CHURCH



A FENLANDS CHURCH STUDY BOOKLET

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A Study

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*The cover picture of a cake is an illustration of Church – all the ingredients of the whole cake are represented in a slice – which is a portrayal of a local church*

This is one of a set of straightforward studies about the Christian Faith. They do not cover every aspect but try to present the basic truths that will help the reader discover more for themselves.

Bible quotes use the New International Version

# THE CHURCH

*1Timothy 3:14-15 Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, 15 if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.*

When Paul wrote to his friend Timothy the Church was just beginning. Its Jewish roots had extended to include Greek, Roman and Barbarian cultures. People of all nations were included and the values associated with God's Kingdom were being applied in the cultures. Some Jewish rules had become obsolete but others still applied. The Old Testament needed careful handling in order to see the truth in Jesus and understand where laws Moses introduced were no longer applicable.

So, Paul gives instruction about the Church and how we ought to behave and organise ourselves. Timothy was an apostle and had some duties to perform that included appointing leaders and establishing a structure that demonstrated the character of Jesus.

Over the centuries, the way we have understood "church" has varied a lot and there have been many very serious conflicts because of it. We need to see that there is only one Church that is made up of all real believers in Jesus Christ. This includes all believers, asleep in Jesus, living and yet to be! It cannot be manifested on earth so that people can see it. God sees this church as the Body of Jesus. We represent him on earth until he returns. The church is seen through the communities of believers that exist all over the world.

*Galatians 1:1 Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— Gal 1:2 and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia*

It is important to note that Paul sometimes writes to a church and other times to churches. Clearly he saw the communities of believers in specific places as separate “bodies”. Corinth, a city, had a church; Galatia, a region like an English County, had churches. It seems that geography defines the communities of believers.

We do not read in the Bible about “the Churches of Paul” or the Churches of Peter”. In fact this kind of thinking is forbidden! Each local community is an independent representation of what the whole Church is. Perhaps we need to state that the church is not a building or an organisation either?

*Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

We can become involved in a kind of politics about what a church is or should be. Rather we ought to get involved in what a church should be doing. There is little instruction about meeting times, days or content of meetings. Most instruction is about personal, family and corporate behaviour. A local group of believers is like an outpost of God’s Kingdom. We preach Christ, telling his Good News to all who will listen. We go around, like Jesus, doing good. We love one another with a pure love and show onlookers what God’s Kingdom is like. We serve in the power of the Holy Spirit. This will cause people to be astounded by the revelation, by words of knowledge and wisdom and they will acknowledge God’s presence among us. Declaring the Good News will be accompanied by spiritual action and manifestation that points to the fact that Jesus is Lord.

*1Corinthians 12:12-13 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

Western cultures tend to emphasise individuality which is not, in itself, wrong. However, God's values teach that the "whole" is greater than the sum of the parts. This may be difficult to appreciate if we have allowed individuality to dominate our thinking. Greek and Roman believers had a similar problem whereas Jewish believers were comfortable about being "we" and accepting a shared experience and shared responsibility. It can be a difficult path for many to be eased out of self-centred views. However, if we accept that we are a part of a body and vital to the working of that body and if we are truly focused on Jesus Christ the journey is possible.

The problem with over-developed self interest is that it does not have much room to be interested in others. God, the Father of the Household (or Body), wants peace and orderliness among his people. He wants us to respect each other's gifts and callings and to avoid argument and competition.

*Hebrews 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Meeting together – assembling – is something required of a local church. We cannot be a community unless we act as one! Merely sitting on a chair in a church service is not meeting with fellow-believers. One might just as well attend a film-show! The idea that church is a gathering of passive receivers led by a few active leaders is not how church is described in the Bible. Even in the Old Testament, all the people of Israel were included in their faith and its values. There were a special group of religious leaders but there were many things that included everyone in serving God. Now, every believer is a "priest" and we all have grace to approach the Father through the Holy Spirit. We have a new and living way opened up by the Lord Jesus!

An over-active individuality can leave one weak, vulnerable and prone to doubt and fear. A piece of charcoal taken out of the barbecue grill will soon grow cold! God has provided us with Church! This is his wisdom and truth for the time we live on earth as believers – waiting for the Day when Jesus returns! The Church is described as God's body, God's garden, God's building and God's household. These all give understanding of how we ought to be.

*Titus 1:5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.*

A local church needs “straightening out”! There are structures and order that God wants us to appreciate. This seems always to begin with the appointment of elders (leaders). This does not mean that the rest of the believers become inactive! Rather, elders should be encouraging and delivering people into their calling in Christ. They may well be responsible for the teaching and doctrine and order of things but everyone else has responsibility to fulfil their ministry. This does not mean that everyone preaches, or everyone leads, or everyone does everything! Elders are not to be expected to allow just anybody to preach or teach or take on a responsibility. Rather, they watch over things to see that everybody has opportunity to fulfil their calling and live up to the light they have from God.

*Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

The church began after Pentecost. The first believers were noted for their devotion to Jesus Christ. They met together, they ate together and they remembered Jesus together through the Bread and the Wine of the Lord's Supper. They were eager to learn about Jesus – and listened to all the apostles taught them. In all this we have the simple basics of what it means to be a church.