

Week 6 – Biblical church – An essential organism

Day 1 – Biblical church – an essential organism

This week we will look at an essential organism for each true Christian: the church of Jesus.

What does the term church really mean?

When the New Testament speaks of the church, it uses the Greek word *ekklesia*.

This term has two meanings:

1. Called out

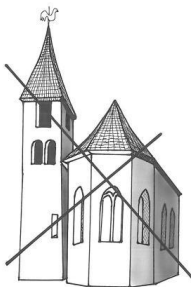
Ekklesia is a congregation of people who were called out of their old life by God.

Something new has happened: the people who responded to God's calling find themselves in a completely new situation in their lives.

They have a **new boss**, and that is Jesus Christ.

They have a **new foundation** that helps them to change their old way of thinking to a new and positive one: God's Word.

They have a **new environment** that has a positive effect on their behavior:
The Church of Jesus.

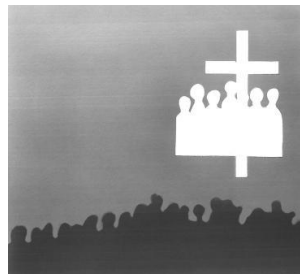


Let's summarise:

Church in a biblical sense is not a building where a religious service takes place, but it refers to people who have been called by God.

Certainly it is great when the church can meet in a functional and convenient building, but this building is not the Christian church; in the best case it is a tool from where the church operates.

The Christian Church is all about people who have been called out of their old lives, and who now belong to Jesus Christ.



2. Called to

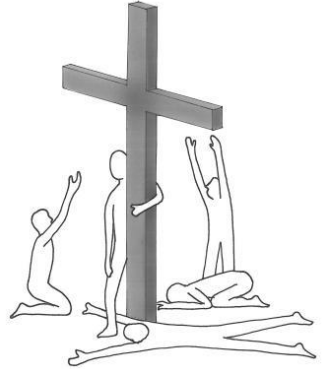
Ekklesia also means to be called to.

This meaning of *ekklesia* underlines the aspect of a committed relationship, not only to God, but also to the brothers.

The background of this term originates from the city states in ancient Greece.

In Athens or Sparta the assembly of citizens was called *ekklesia*. In the *ekklesia* only the people who were not slaves were allowed to participate; they had to be free.

From a spiritual point of view, each person who has been called out of the slavery to sin and called to belonging to God is part of the church.



Biblical church – a quiz

Three out of the six following statements are correct and three are false. Find out the correct ones and cross out the false.

- A. Only those who are registered on a church's membership list can be part of the *ekklesia*.
- B. Christians are people who have been called out of a life without God.
- C. Church has to do with a committed relationship.
- D. Church means a building.
- E. Only mature Christians can belong to the Christian Church.
- F. *Ekklesia* means that all Christians have been called to be part of the Christian Church.

Solution:

Correct: B, C, F // False: A, D, E

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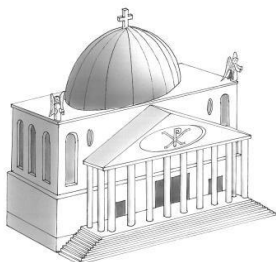
Day 2 – The church in four images

God's Word uses different terms to describe the church.

These terms or pictures will help us to better understand, live and experience the nature and the mission of the biblical church.

Following we will have a look at some of these pictures:

The church is...

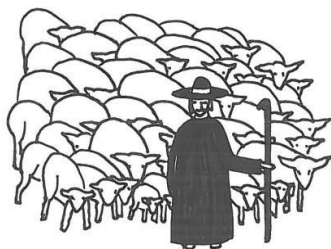


... God's temple

In Ephesians 2:21f Paul says:

In whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (ESV)

Attribute: God is being exalted through our worship; therefore the temple is a place where God wants to dwell.



... God's flock

Read Acts 20:28:

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. (ESV)

Attribute: Christians are not loners, but part of God's flock. Jesus Christ is the shepherd who has bought the church at the price of His own blood. Therefore the flock

is also a place where each individual finds protection, guidance and care.



... The bride of Jesus Christ

Read Ephesians 5:25-33:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband." (ESV)

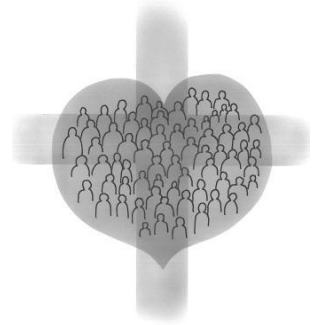
Attribute: Jesus, the bridegroom, loves His Church, the bride. The church, as any other bride, wants to please the bridegroom. For this reason she lives a pure and sanctified life for her bridegroom.

... The body of Christ on earth

Read 1 Corinthians 12:27:

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (ESV)

Attribute: the Church, the body of Christ, wants to make Jesus visible on earth. The picture of the body shows us that the church continues to do the works that Jesus did.



Connect the statements with the correct term.

Jesus becomes visible through the church. The church should continue doing His works.

Jesus loves the Church, and the Church loves Jesus. For this reason the Church should live in a way that pleases Jesus.

Temple

Flock

Bride

Body

The church is a place for worship and therefore a place where the Lord wants to be.

Christians are not loners, they belong together. Jesus is their Lord. Therefore the flock is also a place, where each individual finds protection, guidance and care.

Week 6 – Biblical church – An essential organism

Day 3 – Understanding the church as the body of Christ

The Apostle Paul, who was the author of most of the letters to the different churches of his time uses the picture of the body over and over again to describe the church.

Also for us it is very important to understand that the church is the body of Christ on earth. When the Bible speaks of the body of Christ this covers four levels:

1. Universal body

Here we count all the believers from all confessions, all places and from all times. Included are, for example, Paul, Martin Luther and our brothers and sisters in Africa.

2. The body of Christ in a city or region

The term body can also refer to the churches in a city or region. The Letter to the Galatians, for example, was not written to a certain assembly, but to different congregations that belonged to a specific region.

In our city there are also different assemblies with different characteristics and orientations. Together we make up the body of Christ in the metropolitan area. God's intention is that we live together in harmony and a growing unity.

3. The body of Christ as a local church

Here the local, individual church congregation is addressed. Each congregation of a region is an individual and separate organism. Within a local church each member should embrace a specific responsibility. Within this framework we learn to submit, to build up and to serve one another. We realise that we need each other.



4. The body of Christ in the home cells (pfimi@home)

Finally, within the local church we live out this fourth and last level. In small groups each member can and should serve with the possibilities and talents that God has entrusted to them and in this way build up the others.

Together with brothers and sisters each one uses their gifts to reach the individuals around them who live in a lost world.

We call these groups cells. Cells are small manageable groups that meet in the homes, grow in number and finally divide. This is a continuous process; just like the biological cells in our body do: They grow and as soon as they have reached a certain size, they divide. This also happens continuously.

Jesus becomes effective in our world through his “earthly body”, the church, on all these four levels. His desire is to reach people and to reveal himself through His body.

When we consider these four levels we find that the “large” body of Christ as a whole can only function properly when the small cell fellowship – as basis of the whole – is healthy. The large, the local church, can only work efficiently if the small, the cell group, functions positively.

For this reason all our attention and all our interest have to be focused on the well functioning of the body of Christ at the level of the basic Christian fellowship, the cell.

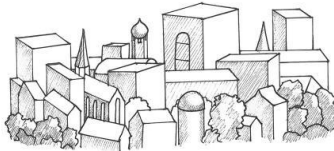
Look up the following passages in your bible and write them down under the corresponding letter:

Philemon 2 // Acts 9:31 // Acts 20:17 // Mt 16:18

A. Universal body



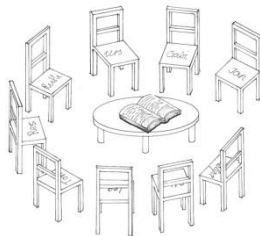
B. Body of Christ in a city or region



C. Local church



D. The body of Christ in a home cell



Solution:

A: Matthew 16:18, B: Acts 9:31, C: Acts 20:17, D: Philemon 2

Day 4 – The four pillars of the local church

Read Acts 2:42 (ESV)

What were the four things that the early Christians did regularly?

You surely found the four things:

1. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching,
2. to fellowship,
3. to the breaking of bread and
4. to prayer.

The early church in Jerusalem gives us evidence of these four basic pillars of the church:

1. Teaching of the apostles



The apostles taught only what they had learnt from Jesus. Jesus' assignment to teach his disciples was consistently implemented by the apostles in Jerusalem.

The Church of Jesus has the assignment and the duty to teach and preach God's Word in all its fullness, well-balanced and in the way it was written, not in the way people would like to hear it.

In the local church this happens primarily through the sermon in the Sunday service. These services have the character of a celebration where Jesus is revered. That is why praise and worship play an important role in the service, alongside the sermon.

2. Fellowship



The individuals who constitute the Church of Jesus commit themselves to sharing their lives with others. This is the biblical meaning of the term fellowship.

However, this quality of fellowship is not possible in a large group. If we take into account that the Church in Jerusalem consisted of 3000 members already on the first day of its formation, we will quickly understand why

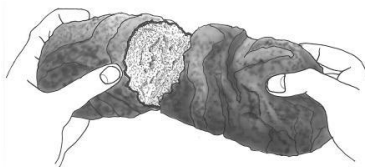
we repeatedly read in Acts: *And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.*“ (Acts 2:46, ESV; see also Acts 5:42)

The temple forecourt was the only place in Jerusalem where a congregation of this size could meet. This meeting corresponds to our church service.

But the real fellowship took place in the houses. In small groups, each member could be cared for. This corresponds to our home cells.

3. The Breaking of bread

When we read about the breaking of bread in God’s Word, it refers on the one hand to eating a meal together and on the other to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper which also took place in the houses.

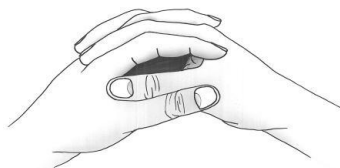


In practice, the early Christians ate a meal together and finished it with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. The shared meal covered the fellowship between the members of the group. The celebration of the Lord’s Supper upheld the spiritual aspect, the constant focus on Jesus’ victory on the Cross and on the promise of His second coming.

4. Prayer

Prayer belongs in the church! Praying is not a religious act, it has to do with our relationship with God; it is sharing our heart with our Lord.

Acts shows convincingly how the church in Jerusalem maintained prayer.



...and you?

How do you experience these four levels of the church in your own life? (Discuss your answer with your companion)

These four elements are the founding pillars of a church!

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Day 5 - Church and structures

The church, as it is described in the Bible, has clear structures.

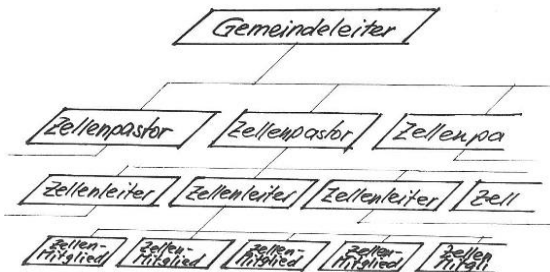
Read: 1. Timothy 3:1ff & Acts 20:17ff

God's Word speaks of leadership ministries. They are carried out by pastors / teachers, elders or overseers. Their task is to lead, to nourish and to protect the church.

Read: Ephesians 4:11ff

God's Word speaks of functional gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers often have an nationwide ministry. Although they are members of a local church, these people may serve in different churches. Their main task is to equip the believers for ministry.

God's Word does not say much about the organization of the local church.



Apart from clear leadership structures we find little information about the organization of local churches. In this area, the local congregation is relatively free.

This circumstance makes us aware of an important truth: the organization of a church has to serve its people. It has nothing to do with a rigid set of rules that should endure from now until eternity.

Our church also has structures:

Who is the leader of your home cell?

Do you know people who have a national ministry and who have served in our church?

Who is your cell pastor?

How would you describe his function?

Who is the leading pastor of our church?

Do you know other members of the leadership of our church?

Reflections for the end of the week

As a local church we strive to put into practice the biblical guidelines of a church.

Our core values are our guide and our help:

- We concentrate on the presence of God (Mt 18:20)
- We concentrate on building a strong and intimate relationship with God (Mt 22:37)
- We concentrate on relationships and fellowship with each other (Mt 22:39)
- We concentrate on sharing the Gospel with the people we are in contact with (Mt 28:19)
- We concentrate on the comprehensive development of every believer (Mt 28:20)

Putting into practice

What has touched you this week and what will you apply to your everyday life?
