

+ ST MATTHEW'S

THE



CHURCH

GOSPEL & COMMUNITY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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## About this Series

St Matt's members come from various church backgrounds, including Baptist, Reformed, Brethren, Orthodox, Charismatic, Independent, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, and some with no previous church experience. Some of us are even Anglican. These are just the people we're aware of, so forgive us if we haven't mentioned you. Each of us brings our own experiences to St. Matthew's, which can be a great strength as we combine our diversity. However, it can also be a weakness as we all operate with different filters regarding church.

But what is the church? Who is it? How is it? What does it do? What is our purpose? Luther claimed that a girl of seven knows what the church is, but that he had to pen thousands of words to explain what she understood. In this series, we want to understand from God through His word what the church is through the lens of the Gospel and Community.

In the New Testament, the word "church" is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which basically means "assembly." When used in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint), it refers to the assembly of Israel - God's called-out and set-apart people who gather before Him (see Deuteronomy 9:10; Acts 7:38). In the New Testament, *ekklesia* is used for the assembly of a city's citizens (Acts 19:32, 39, 41) and a group of God's Christian people who gather regularly (Acts 2:46; 5:11-12; 8:1; 9:31; Romans 16:3-5). The Christian church "churches" or assembles around God's Word in Christ for God's glory.

As we work through selected New Testament passages, we'll see major themes and metaphors emerge. Principally, we see that God now gathers people to Himself through what Christ has done for us in the Gospel; community is formed from and around this Gospel.

The church community is called to serve God in three ways: to serve Him directly in worship; to serve the saints in nurture; and to serve the world in witness. The new Christian community formed from the Gospel is committed to loving God, loving each other, and loving the world loved by Jesus Christ. God's plan for the universe is now happening through the Christian church, and we all get to be a part of this.

No matter what your church background is, here is our prayer: that through this series, God will help us all take the next baby step together, growing in unity with Him, with each other, and reaching out to those around us who don't yet know Christ. May this series strengthen and encourage you to find your place within God's Church, for God's glory.

In Him,

*Andrew Lubbock and Andrew Vella*

## About these Studies

At St Matt's, we aim to empower everyone to confidently read, understand, and apply God's word for themselves. This is one of the reasons we have introduced **SOAP** as a model for daily Bible reading.

In this booklet, you will see the SOAP headings of Scripture, Observations, Application, and Prayer, with a few subheadings to help guide the Observation phase. The basic elements are:

**Scripture:** We believe that Scripture is clear and understandable. By working with the text in front of us, we can all sit under it together, literally on the same page, exploring what it says to determine what it means for us today.

**Observation:** As we see what the text says, we may have **questions** to better understand the passage. Some questions may not be answered in the text, and it is important that we don't force answers that simply aren't there. The goal is to let the text guide us, not our own biases or theology. We also seek to find a **key** to the passage, distilling it into one main idea. This could be a key verse that the whole passage hinges on or a concise statement of the timeless principle in the passage.

**Application:** Since Scripture is living and active, it will change us with the help of the Spirit. From our observations and key, we ask what this passage is calling us to believe or how it is saying we should behave. The more specific to your everyday life, the better. In this series, focusing on the Gospel and how we are to live in community with each other will help in our application.

**Prayer:** We mustn't ignore the text or the application when we come to our group prayer time. We should thank God for His word to us and ask for help to live out our faith to those around us.

To assist those who may find the text or this method challenging, we've included extra questions to help facilitate deeper reflection. Additionally, for this theme of the Church: Gospel and Community, it is worth your time in each study to see what the passage says about the Gospel and the Community. Specifically, see what Jesus has done for this new group of believers (the Gospel) and what this new group of believers (the Community) is to do in response to the Gospel.

## Week 1: Acts 2:29-47 – The Church is Born

### Scripture

<sup>29</sup> “Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. <sup>30</sup> But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. <sup>31</sup> Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. <sup>32</sup> God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. <sup>33</sup> Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. <sup>34</sup> For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

“ ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand <sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” ’

<sup>36</sup> “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

<sup>37</sup> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

<sup>38</sup> Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

<sup>40</sup> With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” <sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

## Observations

### Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

### Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

### Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

### Extra Questions

1. How does Peter's speech in v29-36 establish the identity and authority of Jesus?

2. Would you say that you have responded to the call of repenting and being baptized in the name of Christ? Why/why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Read verses 42–47. What are the primary characteristics of the first church? What part do you play in helping our church be like the description here?

## Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*

## Week 2: Ephesians 1 – Christ: The head of the Church

### Scripture

**1** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: <sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—<sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, <sup>9</sup> he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

<sup>11</sup> In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, <sup>12</sup> in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

<sup>15</sup> For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, <sup>16</sup> I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. <sup>18</sup> I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, <sup>19</sup> and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength <sup>20</sup> he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.



## Observations

### Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

### Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

### Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

## Extra Questions

1. From this passage, how are all three persons of the Godhead involved in our salvation?
2. What blessings do we receive from God the Holy Spirit? How aware of them are you? How do you think you should live in light of these riches you have received?
3. How does the exaltation of Christ above all rule, authority, power, and dominion (Ephesians 1:21) impact your view of current world events and personal challenges?
4. How do you see Christ as our head in Paul's description of the church in Ephesians 1:22-23?

## Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*

## Week 3: Ephesians 2 – New People, New Place, New Purpose

### Scripture

**2** As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. <sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

<sup>11</sup> Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)—<sup>12</sup> remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, <sup>15</sup> by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup> and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. <sup>17</sup> He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

<sup>19</sup> Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. <sup>21</sup> In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

## Observations

### Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

### Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

### Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

## Extra Questions

1. What does it mean to be saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9)? How have you responded to God's grace in Christ, and how has that changed your life?
2. What does it mean to be reconciled? Why is reconciliation needed between people and God? Why is reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles significant?
3. What images and descriptions are used in this passage to describe the new community that God has made?
4. How can the reality of being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit (Ephesians 2:22) shape your commitment to and involvement in your church?

## Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*

## Week 4: Ephesians 3 – Christ in the Church to the Universe

### Scripture

**3** For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

<sup>2</sup> Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. <sup>4</sup> In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. <sup>6</sup> This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> Although I am less than the least of all the Lord’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. <sup>10</sup> His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, <sup>11</sup> according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>12</sup> In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. <sup>13</sup> I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.



## Observations

### Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

### Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

### Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

### Extra Questions

1. How does Paul describe the mystery of Christ revealed to him in Ephesians 3:2-6?

2. How does the church act as a billboard for God and His wisdom, according to Ephesians 3:10?
  
3. How does understanding the eternal purpose of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 3:11) shape your view of the church?
  
4. How can the church better reflect the glory of God, as Paul desires in Ephesians 3:21? What is your role in our church and how do you help St Matt's reflect God's glory?

## Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*

## Week 5: Ephesians 4 – One body

### Scripture

**4** As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup> Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

<sup>7</sup> But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. <sup>8</sup> This is why it says:

“When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.”

<sup>9</sup> (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) <sup>11</sup> So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

<sup>17</sup> So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. <sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. <sup>19</sup> Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

<sup>20</sup> That, however, is not the way of life you learned <sup>21</sup> when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. <sup>22</sup> You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; <sup>23</sup> to be made new in the attitude of your

minds; <sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

<sup>25</sup> Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. <sup>26</sup> “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup> and do not give the devil a foothold. <sup>28</sup> Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

<sup>29</sup> Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

## Observations

### Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

### Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

## Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

## Extra Questions

1. How do the concepts of one body and one Spirit (Ephesians 4:4-6) influence your view of the church and your role within it? Why is unity so important? How does humility aid unity?
2. Are you being equipped for ministry by the leaders and teachers in your church (Ephesians 4:11-12)? If so, what services are you doing? If not, what equipping do you need? What happens to the body of Christ if the leaders do all the works of service?
3. How does understanding Christ as the head of the body (Ephesians 4:15-16) impact your daily walk and interactions with other believers? What steps can you take to ensure that each part of the body of Christ, including yourself, works properly and builds itself up in love (Ephesians 4:16)?

4. Read Ephesians 4:17–32. How did Paul compare the old, or unsaved, person with the new, or saved? Why do believers live differently compared to their behavior before they were saved?

## Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*

## Week 6: Romans 12 – One-Many-One

### Scripture

**12** Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

<sup>4</sup> For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup> We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; <sup>7</sup> if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; <sup>8</sup> if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

<sup>9</sup> Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

<sup>11</sup> Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

<sup>12</sup> Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

<sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.

<sup>20</sup> On the contrary:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”

<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

## Observations

### Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

### Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

### Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

### Extra Questions

1. How often do you keep God's mercy in view with yourself and others?



2. Do you know what your gift(s) might be? How are you using your gifts to serve others in the body of Christ?
  
3. How are you using your body for the one body of believers with love for one another?
  
4. Of the many traits listed in Romans 12—being joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer, practicing hospitality, blessing and not cursing, not being conceited, associating with those of lowly positions, and living at peace with everyone—which one do you struggle with the most? How can you grow in these things?

## Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*

## Week 7: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 – United not Divided

### Scripture

<sup>17</sup> In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. <sup>18</sup> In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. <sup>19</sup> No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. <sup>20</sup> So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, <sup>21</sup> for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup> In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup> For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

<sup>27</sup> So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. <sup>29</sup> For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. <sup>30</sup> That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. <sup>31</sup> But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. <sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.

<sup>33</sup> So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. <sup>34</sup> Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.

## Observations

### Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

### Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

### Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

### Extra Questions

1. What do we look back to during the Lord's Supper (11:23–26)? What are we to look ahead to (11:26)?

2. How much do you think about others in communion? How does the practice of the Lord's Supper demonstrate your understanding of unity with God and with each other (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)?
  
3. How can you encourage others in your church community to approach the Lord's Supper with the right heart and attitude?
  
4. How can the principles of the Lord's Supper guide you in other areas of worship and fellowship within the church?

### Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*

## Week 8: 1 Corinthians 12 – One not Many; Many for the One

### Scripture

**12** Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. <sup>2</sup>You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. <sup>3</sup>Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit. <sup>4</sup>There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. <sup>5</sup>There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup>There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. <sup>7</sup>Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. <sup>8</sup>To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup>to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, <sup>10</sup>to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup>All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. <sup>12</sup>Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup>For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. <sup>14</sup>Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. <sup>15</sup>Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. <sup>16</sup>And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup>But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. <sup>19</sup>If they were all one part, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>As it is, there are many parts, but one body. <sup>21</sup>The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” <sup>22</sup>On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup>and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, <sup>24</sup>while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it,

<sup>25</sup> so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. <sup>26</sup> If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup> Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

## Observations

### Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

### Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

## Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

## Extra Questions

1. How do you see yourself as part of Christ's body? How does understanding that the body of Christ belongs to Christ and is made up of many parts, yet forms one body, influence your view of church participation (1 Corinthians 12:12)?
2. What gifts do you have, and how are you using them for the common good, as described in 1 Corinthians 12:7? What gifts might you desire for the common good, and how can you seek them in a way that benefits the entire body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:31)?
3. How do you value the diversity of gifts and roles within the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)? In what ways can you promote unity and avoid division within the church, recognizing that all parts of the body are necessary (1 Corinthians 12:25)?

4. What is God's purpose in giving Christians spiritual gifts? How can we keep our diversity from becoming disunity?

### Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*



## Week 9: 1 Corinthians 13:1-14:25 – The Church and Love

### Scripture

**13** If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

<sup>8</sup> Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. <sup>12</sup> For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. <sup>13</sup> And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

**14** Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. <sup>2</sup> For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. <sup>3</sup> But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. <sup>4</sup> Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. <sup>5</sup> I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.

<sup>6</sup> Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? <sup>7</sup> Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? <sup>8</sup> Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? <sup>9</sup> So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words

with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. <sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. <sup>11</sup> If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me. <sup>12</sup> So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.

<sup>13</sup> For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say. <sup>14</sup> For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. <sup>15</sup> So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding. <sup>16</sup> Otherwise when you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the position of an inquirer, say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying? <sup>17</sup> You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified.

<sup>18</sup> I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. <sup>19</sup> But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

<sup>20</sup> Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. <sup>21</sup> In the Law it is written:

“With other tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.”

<sup>22</sup> Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers. <sup>23</sup> So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? <sup>24</sup> But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, <sup>25</sup> as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among you!”

## Observations

## Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

## Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

## Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

## Extra Questions

1. What does church mean for you? How eager are you to attend church every week?
  
2. How does Paul's description of love challenge your understanding of what the church should be for you (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)? Which qualities of love would you most like to grow in?



## Week 10: Revelations 2-3 – The Future of the Church

### Scripture

**2** “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. <sup>2</sup>I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. <sup>3</sup>You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

<sup>4</sup>Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup>Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. <sup>6</sup>But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

<sup>7</sup>Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

<sup>8</sup>“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. <sup>9</sup>I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. <sup>10</sup>Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.

<sup>11</sup>Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.

<sup>12</sup>“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. <sup>13</sup>I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

<sup>14</sup>Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so

that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality.

<sup>15</sup> Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

<sup>16</sup> Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

<sup>17</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.

<sup>18</sup> “To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. <sup>19</sup> I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. <sup>22</sup> So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. <sup>23</sup> I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

<sup>24</sup> Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets, ‘I will not impose any other burden on you, <sup>25</sup> except to hold on to what you have until I come.’

<sup>26</sup> To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—<sup>27</sup> that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’ —just as I have received authority from my Father. <sup>28</sup> I will also give that one the morning star. <sup>29</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

**3** “To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

<sup>2</sup> Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. <sup>3</sup> Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

<sup>4</sup> Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup> The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. <sup>6</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

<sup>7</sup> “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. <sup>8</sup> I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. <sup>9</sup> I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup> Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

<sup>11</sup> I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. <sup>12</sup> The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. <sup>13</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

<sup>14</sup> “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. <sup>15</sup> I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. <sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

<sup>19</sup> Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. <sup>20</sup> Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

<sup>21</sup> To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

## Observations

### Questions from the text

*What verses are unclear? Does the rest of the text help answer your questions?*

### Key

*Which verse/idea does this whole passage hang off, and why?*

### Application

*From the key above, what is this passage telling us today?*

### Extra Questions

1. If there was a section of Revelation 2 written to your church, what would you be praised for? Accused of? Admonished to do?





## Prayer

*Thank God for the truth in this passage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us live out that truth.*

## Appendix A: Can my small group be my church?

Many Christians are part of a small group that meets regularly to study the Bible, encourage each other and pray.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, small groups are part of the ministries of a particular church. Sometimes, they have no association with a church and exist for reasons of friendship, tradition, location or common interests. For people who find larger gatherings difficult, small groups can be a more accessible way of meeting with other Christians. We may wonder, “Can my small group be my church? Do I really need to go to a Sunday church?”<sup>2</sup>

A healthy small group has many features of ‘church’: it's a group of people who gather in Jesus' name to read the Bible and pray, and Jesus says that he is there: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Matt 18:20). In some contexts, especially where persecution prevents larger gatherings, meeting in small groups in homes might be the only way to function as a church.

But there are some important reasons why it's not accurate or helpful to think of your small group as ‘my church’ over and above the Sunday gathering. To start with, when Jesus spoke about being with the “two or three”, he is assuming that those two or three belong to a larger church:

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take *one or two others* along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of *two or three* witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, *tell it to the church*. And if he refuses to listen even to *the church*, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where *two or three* are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” (Matt 18:15-20)

Here, Jesus is anticipating the creation or building of his church (Matt 16:18) and alluding to what the Mosaic law says about serious charges (Deut 17:6, 19:15). He does not see a small gathering as replacing the larger church.

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<sup>1</sup> For a description of Christian small groups, including their many benefits, see Colin Marshall's book *Growth Groups: How to lead disciple-making small groups* (especially chapters 1-3).

<sup>2</sup> I don't think the larger gathering needs to be on a Sunday, although most churches continue to meet on this day.

Secondly, our larger gatherings better reflect the one heavenly church that exists now and that we look forward to on the last day.<sup>3</sup> This gathering will include “a great multitude... from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” standing before the Father and the Son (Rev 7:9); this is “the assembly of the firstborn” (Heb 12:23). Sundays offer us a taste of being with more people than we can comfortably know. In those moments together, we join with many voices to praise God for who he is and what he has done.

Thirdly, being part of the whole church helps us understand and better express some of the analogies or metaphors the Bible uses to describe church.<sup>4</sup> As a *body*, we really do see the many parts working together when there are more than ten or so of us. We can take our own place in serving according to how God has made us. As a *flock* led by Jesus, we can let ourselves be fed and guided by those shepherds or pastors he has appointed over us.

Although in many ways church as *family* is expressed well in our small groups, the larger gathering helps us appreciate the extended family into which God has placed us and gives us more opportunities to welcome people into the family. We are continually looking outward rather than inward.

Fourthly, making your small group your church carries the risk of stunting your spiritual growth. The positives of the small group can be twisted into things that only serve our convenience or selfishness. For example:

- The group is made up only of people I know and like.
- I don't have to meet new people.
- I don't have to deal with a crowd or situations of social awkwardness.
- The study is often less personally challenging than the Sunday sermon.
- I don't have to serve in inconvenient or time-consuming ways.
- My own problems can become more of the focus.
- There are no real authority figures there.
- Nobody asks me for money.

If these are the reasons you prefer a small group over the larger church, perhaps you need to reflect on whether immaturity or selfishness is a problem.

Theologian Broughton Knox wrote:

A Christian who is satisfied with the fellowship of his home or of his house church, and who does not wish to grow in fellowship of the larger group of Christians, is using his home or his house church as a club, getting from it what he wants. A fellowship, in contrast to a club, must be absolutely

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<sup>3</sup> See chapter 2 of *Unmissable Church: Why you need church and church needs you*

<sup>4</sup> See chapter 3 of above

other-person-centred, knowing no limits to its fellowship. Such is the fellowship of heaven, and the limits we know in our earthly fellowship are simply the limits of human life and not of attitude.<sup>5</sup>

Could that be the case for us? Are we merely getting what we want from our small group without seeing the bigger picture of Christian fellowship? If group members get stuck in this way of thinking, groups can actually become exclusive clubs or cliques rather than healthy Christian small groups.

Finally, there are many more theological and practical positives of seeing the large public gathering as your church. Each of these could be expanded upon and will appear in different places in this book, but in brief:

- At church I can hear the word of God proclaimed (rather than merely discussed). The Bible is enormously powerful, and to sit under faithful and compelling preaching is immensely transformative.
- Sunday church is public. This fits with the Bible's expectation of outsiders visiting (1 Cor 14:22-25).
- I can potentially meet non-Christians and help them come to know Jesus.
- I can meet new people who could be a blessing in my life (and I in theirs).
- I can serve my church family in more ways.
- I can be more aware of what is happening around church such as upcoming events, new plans and prayer needs.
- If my small group finishes up, I'm still a connected part of the larger church.

So, while small groups are brilliant in so many ways, don't let your group become your church to the detriment of the larger gathering. "Can my small group be my church?" is really the wrong question. A better question would be: "How can my small group better function alongside Sunday church to fulfill what God wants for his people?" As we work out answers to this question, we can love and serve both our small group and our church.

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<sup>5</sup> DB Knox, *Selected Works of D. Broughton Knox*, vol 2, *Church and Ministry* (ed K Birkett), Matthias Media, 2006, p 97.

## References and Resources

### The introduction used ideas from:

The Church (Contours of Christian Theology) by Edmund P. Clowney

“Church” in The New Bible Dictionary

What is the Church<sup>6</sup> by Chris Hutchison

### Some of the questions came from Warren W. Wiersbe’s “Be series”:

Be Dynamic (Acts 1-12): Experience the Power of God’s People

Be Rich (Ephesians): Gaining Things that Money Can’t Buy

Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man’s Knowledge and God’s Wisdom

Be Victorious (Revelation): In Christ You Are an Overcomer

### Appendix A came from:

Unmissable Church: Why you need church and church needs you by Richard Sweatman & Antony Barraclough

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<sup>6</sup> You can view this article online at: <https://www.9marks.org/article/what-is-a-church/>