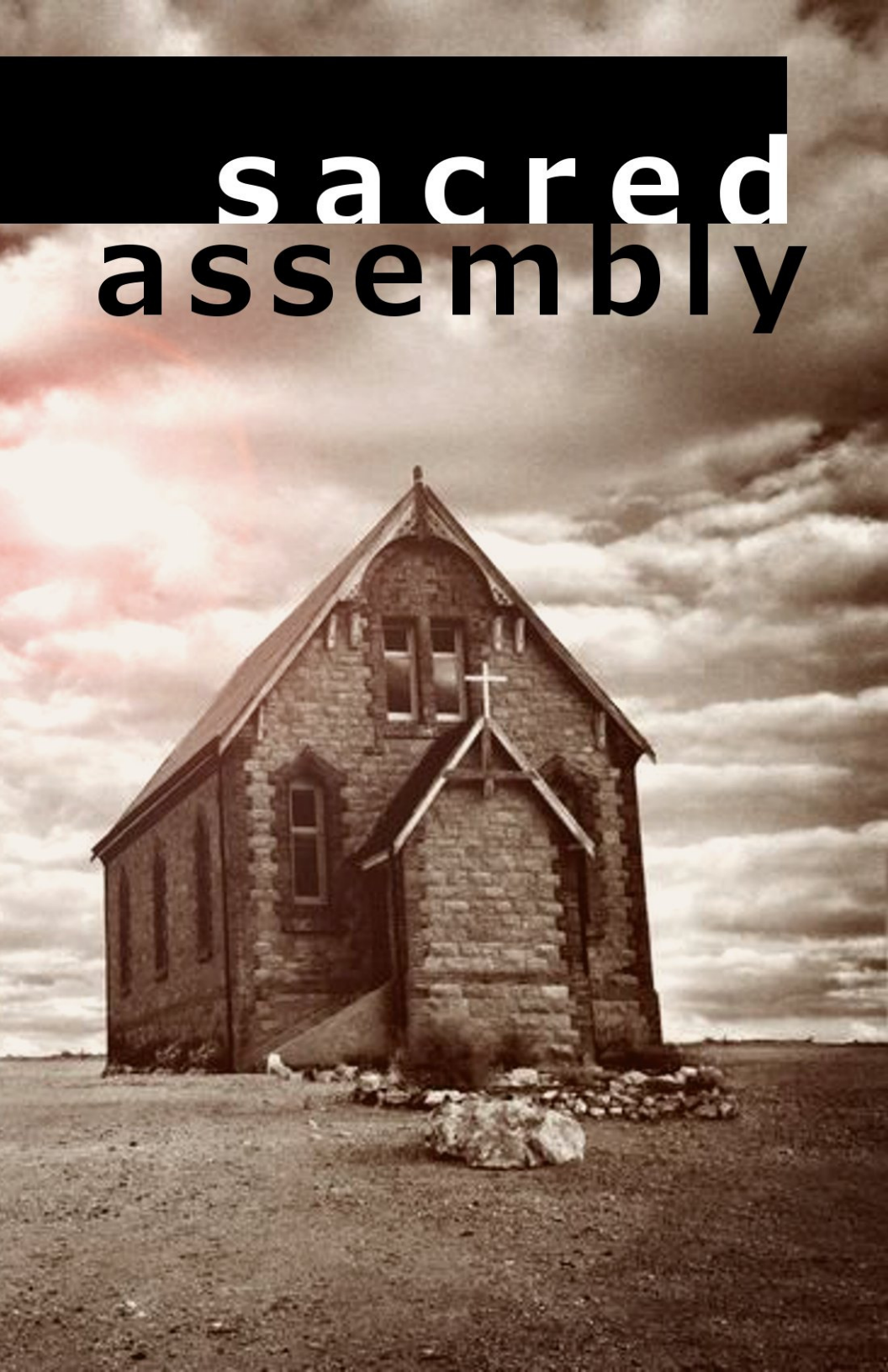


# sacred assembly



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## the point

*Five months ago we set out with a ragtag group of people to start Communion Church. This was not the beginning of the journey, but things change once you actually begin to turn an idea into a reality. When it comes to church that is especially true. Our culture, and I mean Christian culture, has a love/hate relationship with the church. We love it until we hate it. We pour massive amounts of time and energy into it, but often are disillusioned when it does not turn out the way that we had hoped or planned.*

*This sermon series is an attempt to get the people of Communion Church on common ground as to WHO WE ARE as a local expression of God's family, as well as WHY WE DO the things that we do as a church. Defining the church (also known as ecclesiology) has been a source of conflict in the church. But this does not mean that it is something to be avoided.*

*Our inclination is to take some of Jesus' commands and to build our own ideas around them as support. To create a new kind of church that responds and relates to the changing needs of our culture. To use our own ideas to replace the outdated traditionalism that has made many churches 'dead.' We need to get our idea of church from He who church was created by and for. We will take the next five weeks to dig into Scripture; to replace our notions of church with the definition afforded us by God.*

*Prepare to be challenged.*

*Prepare to be confused.*

*Prepare to see the church in a new way.*

*Prepare to love the church more than you ever have before.*

**for His glory.**

Jim Fikkert

Lead Pastor of Communion Church



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## the title

### Sacred

The series title, "Sacred Assembly" represents an attitude we'd like to recapture in our people. The word "Sacred" can mean a great many things. That which is "Sacred" is often contrasted against that which is "Secular." Narrowly defined, sacredness has caused many in history to venerate books, music, and other objects dedicated to a deity or intended for a religious purpose. Taken to the broadest of irreligious definitions, the term sacred can describe anything someone reveres (in truth or jest) from memories, restaurants, or even days of the week. Our hope is to redeem this word and recapture its original meaning relative to our gathering as the church.



You've probably heard it asked, "Is there nothing sacred anymore?" Usually this comes in response to hearing coworkers vomit out profanity, watching Hollywood make movies about topics once taboo, or seeing young adults "looking like fools with their pants on the ground". When

speaking of the church, the use of the term "Sacred" has less to do with what we might see or even do as an organization, and more about an attitude we should be holding—which invariably impacts what we do. The term sacred comes from the word "*Sacren*" meaning "to consecrate" or, in biblical terms, to set apart as Holy and special for God. In other words, our gatherings are more than just compulsory get-togethers where kids are babysat, songs are sung, a guy yells for 45 minutes, and we eat a meal that would leave a mouse famished.

Viewing a church gathering as a consecrated corporate spiritual experience is foreign to our culture of consumerism. My fear is that we approach our Sunday morning worship with a pragmatic spirit as



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opposed to seeking to worship God by the power and in the presence of the Holy Spirit. **This series is not a call for more charismata but a reformation of our view of our time of worship on Sunday.**

### Assembly

The word 'church' in the New Testament is translated from the Greek word 'ekklesia' which comes from two words 'ek' meaning 'out' and 'kaleo' meaning to 'call.' An ekklesia or 'calling out' is a unique kind of assembly. The word ekklesia was a political term, not a religious one. In classical Greek "ekklesia" meant "an assembly of citizens summoned by the crier, the legislative assembly. Relative to Jesus and His Church, it is an intentional, organized gathering of God's people, assembled for specific purposes—in this case worship of the King to whom we declare our allegiance.

But the church isn't called an "assembly" simply because they gather together. When Jesus speaks of the church, He uses a term that is rich with Old Testament meaning. In Exodus, God assembled Israel before Him at Mount Sinai to make his covenant with them (**Ex. 19**). The Exodus redemption from Egypt culminates at this moment as Israel is identified as an assembly because they gather in the presence of God (**Deut. 4.10; 9.10; 10.4; 18.16**). Later Israel regularly assembles, always remembering the "great assembly" of Sinai. Three times a year Israel assembled for the feasts of the sacred calendar (**Lev. 23**) and the prophets described the future and complete blessing of God's presence in a great assembly which included Gentiles (**Isaiah 2.2-4; 56/6-8; Joel 2.15-17**).

To worship in that assembly is to gather in God's "ekklesia". Just as Israel before us, our assemblies are unique gatherings in the presence of God. Sadly, today the Sunday morning assembly is at the center of conflict.



Many well meaning believers argue that not only does the church not need order, but that it does not need regular worship services. They condemn the church for its performance-driven experiences full of passive spectators and an inspired, but irrelevant lecture. Their new mantras are things like, "We need to stop going to church and start being the church." It's not that they don't think we need worship, rather, they believe that it is never an event but "a lifestyle". In their pursuit of a more "genuine" worship experience, they create communities of all shapes and sizes unified by their belief that, regardless of form, "wherever two are gathered" God is there. More than that, they claim that not only that God is uniquely present, but His church is made manifest.

While there is some truth in their criticisms, their responses are often unbiblical. Without question, the church is more than a worship service BUT, the worship services, the gatherings, the corporate assembly is essential to the very identity and life of the church. Our hope is not to argue against every "new" model of church being offered, or answer every critique of every author who thinks they know the disease and antidote. What we want is to recapture a deeper and wider vision for what we do on Sunday morning. Our hope is that all who attend Communion Church will realize that we are doing more than coming together to sing songs and hear someone talk.

Our assembly is a sacred experience where, as one body, one people, and one family, we publicly celebrate our shared identity in the one God's covenant with us through the life, death, resurrection, and return of the Lord Jesus Christ.



# Week 1

## The Church: Assembly

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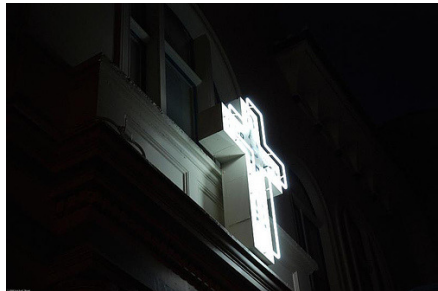
### WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

“...I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

**Matthew 16.18**

What is the church? There are fewer and fewer people that can offer a clear answer to that question. Yet, there are an increasing number of people who can easily describe why they “love Jesus”, but have “given up” on the church. Jesus loved the church so much He gave up everything for her. Not only did he promise to build the church through his death, but he also promised that his love would continue to make the church more beautiful (**Ephesians 5.25-33**). In other words, it is impossible to love Jesus and not his bride—they are inseparable.

Many believe that the church has lost its way. Jesus did not fail to build or care for his bride; rather, sinful men and women corrupted her beauty. This growing sense of disillusionment has been met by an American evangelicalism



attempting to “redefine” the church with numerous “new” kinds of churches: *the emerging church, the house church, the purpose-driven church, the organic church, etc.*

Without knowing what the church actually is, they seek to fix what is wrong with it, and end up building communities that are often unbiblical. Reacting to a church and leadership they view as hurtful,

impotent, and institutionalized, they allow everything to be redefined by their emotions and experiences, even Scripture itself.

The current attempts to reinvent the church are often accompanied by a call to recapture the spirit of the New Testament Church, especially from the Book of Acts. Ironically, the same passages used to support their claims are in fact the very passages that admonish them. The people of God are not birthed in the Book of Acts, but in the Old Testament. The church is not a parenthesis in God’s redemptive plan, it is the fulfillment of all of God’s Old Testament



promises to renew and deliver His people, as the church of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Calls from today’s movements to return to the church of **Acts 2** often emphasize the relational simplicity that exists there while ignoring the explicit truth claims of apostolic authority, qualified leadership, and organized structures.

From a biblical perspective, the church is not less, it is more than most think. As people of extremes, many want to make the church an either/or when it should be a both/and. The church is both fellowship AND commitment. The church is both organic AND structured. The church is both loving AND disciplined. The church is both communal AND missional. And though the church is full of flawed men and women, her identity, purpose, and role as Christ’s bride is certain.

### discussion questions:

1. Would you consider the church that you are now in to be a true church? How do you know? Have you ever been a member of a church that you would think to be a false church?
2. Read **Matthew 18.15-20**. In context, what does verse 20 mean? Are two or three gathering together on the golf course or at Starbucks a church? Why or why not?
3. When you think of the church as the invisible fellowship of all true believers throughout all time, how does it affect the way you think of yourself as an individual Christian?
4. Read some of the passages listed below. Which of the metaphors for the church most impress you? How do they change your view of the church? (**John 15.5, Romans 11.17-24, 1Cor 3.6-9, 1Cor 3.9, John 4.35, 1Peter 2.4-8, Heb. 3.6, 1Timothy 3.15, 1Cor. 12.12-27**)
5. Read **Ephesians 5.7-13**. What does Paul write as one of the purposes of the church? Where or how do we see this?

### scenario:

A Christian friend tells you that they love Jesus but not the church. They tell you that going to church doesn’t make them a Christian and that they enjoy community with a few friends semi-regularly. In their view, they cannot see the value of church relative to their personal relationship with God. How do you respond?



Week 2  
**The Doctrine: Authority**

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WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

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I hope to come to you soon,  
but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay,  
you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God,  
which is the church of the living God,  
a pillar and buttress of the truth.

**1 Timothy 3.14-15**

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We live in a world of autonomy. There is not a more offensive comment than to claim that something, anything is true, making other beliefs false. This is exactly what Jesus does, and what He calls His church to do. When He says, 'I am the way the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but through me' (**John 14.6**), Jesus draws a line in the sand and claims that His truth is the only truth.

The church is tasked with supporting and defending this truth. The second half of the Great Commission is to 'teach them to observe all that [Jesus] has commanded' (**Matthew 28.20**). The church is not just a place of acceptance and tolerance, the church is a place where God's people must be sharpened and refined by His truth as are sanctified to His will.

This leads us to some very serious questions. Who defines what the truth is? Aren't exclusive truth claims what lead to hatred and wars? Don't discussions of truth do more harm than good? Shouldn't we have a 'little less conversation and a little more action' (Elvis Presley)?

The answer to all of this is the Gospel. The gospel not only defines for us what the facts of truth are, but they also give us a nature of truth. In the life of Jesus Christ, we are introduced to a truth that is: sacrificing, gracious, loving, and absolutely offensive. In people who are changed by the gospel we see a unity based on our shared love for Jesus, rather than a focus on the things that distinguish us. This truth also gives us a unified mission: to live lives that proclaim the truth that has freed us from the bondage of sin.

The church does not create truth, it simply responds to it. It supports it, as pillars and buttresses support the roof and walls of a building. Our beliefs are not personal. They are not individual. There aren't many different truths. There is one truth, Jesus Christ, and the church exists to live this truth out in how we relate to one another in community and how we relate to the world on mission.

The church exists to make this truth more true. Not to add to it, but to bring about the reality of the truth in the people that it connects with. The local church is tasked with bringing together people, from many different experiences, economic situations, jobs, and hobbies, and shaping them into a single entity, a body, that lives and moves from a single source, the Head. This isn't brainwashing, its transformation.

### discussion questions:

1. Read **Romans 10.17**. What is the truth that Paul is referring to?
2. In **Romans 1.16**, the apostle Paul writes, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." What is the Gospel? (see **1Cor. 15.3-8**)
3. What is the role of God's Word in the world? Read **Ezekiel 37.1-10**. What is the connection between breath, spirit, speech, and word?
4. How does the truth change the people in the church? Read **John 17.17** and **Ephesians 5.25-26**.
5. Asked about his accomplishments as a Reformer, Martin Luther said, "I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word: otherwise I did nothing...the Word did it all." Read **Isaiah 55.10-11** and **Romans 10.17**. Why is preaching so important?

### scenario:

A friend tells you that he is leaving the church because he feels that weekly gatherings are not required biblically and that preaching itself is an invention of man. He dislikes the 'simplistic' claim that there is an absolute truth and believes that God expresses His truth in many different religions including, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism. How would you respond?



## Week 3

# The Leadership: Elders

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### WHO IS LEADING GOD'S PEOPLE?

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.

**Acts 20.28**

When God gave the fifth commandment to, "Honor your Father and Mother" (**Ex.20.12**), he reaffirmed the inherent authoritative structure that exists as an essential aspect of the design for His people. There is a growing desire to see the church abandon the constraints of structure and authority in exchange for a more relational community devoid of hierarchy. As writer and pastor Kevin DeYoung observes in his Why we love the Church, "There are only two problems with this model of church: it's unbiblical and it's unrealistic."

The Bible says that God is a God of order (**1Cor. 14.40**). Even though sin can often cause us to make an idol out of order, without order we have chaos. The key is to have the right kind of order which comes from biblically qualified leadership. As we confess that men have, at times, failed to lead the church perfectly, we mustn't abandon the need for biblical leadership. Even though leaders fail, a leaderless church is not the answer.

God has declared that his people be led by godly men. Even in the Old Testament, we see men selected as elders to help shepherd and judge the people (**Deut. 18**). God continues to engage His people through his prophets, priests, and kings as an extension of His authority. When Jesus comes to earth, he calls 12 men to aid him in his ministry. Even within these 12 we see a hierarchy of leadership develop. When it comes time for Jesus to be crucified, his prayer in John 17 make clear the roles that exist within the Trinitarian relationship itself, serving as a model for the relationships of His people.

After Jesus ascension and the empowerment of the church is realized in the book of Acts, we see the apostles exercising authority over all of the churches

planted (**2Corinthians 13.1-4**). In their writings, the apostles encourage the elders (pastors) to exhort, rebuke, correct, teach, and exercise discipline over the assembly. As the church grows, the apostles install Deacons to assist them in managing the practical ministries of the church (**Acts 6.1-7**). We see the members of the church charged to submit to their leaders (**Heb. 13.17**).

The question is not whether the church should have leaders, but what kind. Again, the Scriptures provide a clear description of the kinds of men who are called to eldership. To be considered for eldership, a man must exhibit the highest of Christian character according to the qualifications of Scripture (**1Timothy 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-9**). God equips those he calls. In other words, the qualifications listed in Scripture are not traits to be developed as much as they are traits to be identified. The elders of the local church are empowered with the collective authority and wisdom to discern who is qualified and who is not as it is their responsibility to confirm their call.

#### discussion questions:

1. What is wrong with a "leaderless" church?
2. What do you think is the supreme responsibility of the elders of the church? How does the metaphor of a Shepherd help us?
3. Read and discuss the meaning of the eldership qualifications found in **1Timothy 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-9**. How do you determine the meaning of some of the more ambiguous qualifications? When all is said and done, who decides if someone is qualified or not?
4. What role do you think the congregation should play in the selection and installment of elders? (**Acts 20.28**)
5. Read **Hebrews 13.17**. How do the words "obey" and "submit" make you feel? Why do you think you feel that way?

#### scenario:

A friend of yours had a bad experience with a church in which they disagreed with a particular decision. Because this was more than a disagreement over the color of carpet, their experience left them bitter toward and skeptical of church leadership. Though they continue attend church semi-regularly, they refuse to ever become a member of a church. When asked about verses like **Hebrews 13.17**, they respond with reading from **1Peter 2**. They claim that because they are part of the "priesthood of believers", they don't need to submit to leadership. How would you respond to them? Or would you engage them at all? If not, why?

## The Covenant: Agreement

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### HOW DO WE RELATE?

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... to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made ... according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord..

**Ephesians 3.9-11**

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There is a saying, 'contracts are not worth the paper that they are written on.' In the world that we live in there is a paper trail for everything, but the paper means nothing if the people behind it are not honest. So contracts in themselves mean very little, but a contract with the God of the universe gets its power from the maker of the agreement. We call these contracts: COVENANT.

The foundation of all of God's dealings with man is the covenant. It is the basis of all that God has done, is doing, and will do in time and on earth. Nothing can be understood rightly apart from an understanding of God's covenant. In general: The covenant is the means by which man has communion with God. It is a living bond between God and man wherein God pledges to be our God and claims us to be His people. (**Leviticus 26.12**).

Through His covenants, God reminds us that He is the central figure in the story. No matter how much we seem to be in control, He is the one that causes the world to turn. He is the one who defines the relationship, both its blessings and consequences.

In Scripture we see two kinds of covenants: direct covenants and renewal covenants. The direct covenants are those in which there are two parties: God and man. These agreements are initiated by God, upheld by God, and judged by God (He has final say as to whether or not the terms are upheld). These covenants form the basis for our understanding of the covenantal nature of our God, as we see that this is the way that He has chosen to interact with His people.



Renewal covenants form the basis for how we practice covenantal living within the church (**Joshua 24.22-25**). These covenants do not institute new rules, but reinforce previous promises. In these covenants, the initiator is God's earthly leaders, the upholding parties are God's people, and God still plays the role of the judge. The purpose of this covenant is threefold: to be a reminder of the covenant that already exists, to make clear what it means to be God's people (and in turn teach who God is), and to create a human level of accountability to the promises made.

As the church, we are included in God's covenant. The church is the recipient of God's covenant promises. This also means that we are responsible to uphold our part of the agreement. The church is not a bunch of individuals living parallel to one another without responsibility toward one another. As God's covenant people, we must covenant with one another to serve God as a family: watching out for one another, encouraging one another, rebuking one another, and working together to serve God with our whole lives.

### discussion questions:

1. Have you been burned by an agreement in the past? Did this lead you to wanting a better contract or throwing out the whole idea?
2. What things symbolized by the Lord's Supper have received new emphasis in your thinking as a result of hearing today's sermon? Do you feel more eager to participate in the Lord's Supper after learning more about it? Why or Why Not?
3. In what ways (if any) will you approach the Lord's Supper differently now? Which of the things symbolized in the Lord's Supper is most encouraging to your Christian life right now?
4. Read 1Corinthians 11.27. Discuss what you think it means to "eat or drink" in an unworthy manner? How does this relate to our approach to worship overall (See Matthew 5.23-24)?

### scenario:

You bring a friend to church who you know is not a Christian. Following the sermon, the pastor invites people to participate in Communion. He fails to inform those listening that Communion is for repentant believers. As you go up for Communion, your friend follows and also participates. What would you say to your non-Christian friend? What if your friend was an unrepentant Christian?



Week 5  
**The Sacraments: Sign/Seal**

BAPTISM

And Jesus came and said to them,  
“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.

**Matthew 28.18-19**

Baptism is a public declaration of faith and active identification with Jesus in his death and resurrection. Though there are slight disagreements about *how* someone should be baptized, a *biblical* Christian church believes that baptism is a necessary part of fellowship.

Once a person accepts Jesus Christ as their Savior and receives the seal of our faith in the Person of the Holy Spirit, then the Bible calls us to make our private commitment a public declaration. Baptism is not “magical”, nor does it come *before* salvation. Simply, Baptism is a visible representation of the invisible change that has occurred in the individual as a result of belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A believer is someone who realizes that their sin separates them from God. A person who is transformed by the Gospel knows they will never be “good enough” to reach God through their own good works or religious activities. Therefore, they depend on Jesus Christ's work, His death on the cross alone that paid the debt for their sins, declared us innocent, redeemed us from slavery, appeased the wrath of God, and, ultimately, brought us back into right relationship with our Creator.

**Romans 6.3-4** teaches us about the deeper significance of baptism. The baptism of a believer is in many ways a public funeral. Our baptism not only marks our union with Christ, it symbolizes the spiritual burial of our old self, clothed in sin, and the rising of a new man clothed with Jesus. It is a ceremony like no other, giving us a new identity and new name: the name of Jesus. It is our initiation rite into identity and participation in the church.



COMMUNION

Then they told what had happened  
on the road, and how he was known  
to them in the breaking of the bread.

**Luke 24.35**

Communion was instituted by Jesus on the night before he would be crucified. Only hours before he was to be betrayed and arrested, a Jewish Jesus sat down with his Jewish disciples to celebrate the Jewish feast of Passover. The Passover meal symbolized the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt when God killed all of the firstborn sons of the land, but spared Israel through the blood of a sacrificed lamb. Fulfilling all that the Old Testament had pointed toward, Jesus declared that He was in fact the bread and the wine that they ate and drank (**1 Corinthians 11.24-26, Luke 22. 19-20**).

We read in **Acts 2** that immediately following Pentecost, Christians began “breaking bread” in remembrance of Jesus. The apostle Paul has much to say about who should take Communion and how in **1 Corinthians 10.15-22** and **11.17-34**. The concern for today's church is that Communion has lost its sacredness and, as a result, it's meaning. Many of us grew up at churches where we took communion once a month out of routine. Ushers would pass large plates with microscopic crackers and smurf-size cups of juice. Without much thought, we'd take a cup and wafer because it felt weird not to. We felt like we should without knowing why. The experience felt obligatory, like an add-on, something you did out of obligation with little intentionality.

In truth, Communion is the zenith of our worship service on Sunday; it is the moment that all moments point to—remembering the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord. We worship together with our voices in song; we worship together through hearing the Word of God proclaimed; we worship together through giving of our offerings; and we worship together through taking of communion. Though we do not believe Jesus is literally present in elements of Communion, we do believe that He is spiritually present through the indwelling Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer. It is a meal like no other, one filled with joy, thanksgiving, and a deep abiding love (**John 6.22-59**).



## discussion questions:

### baptism

1. What was your knowledge of baptism before this study? Have you come to appreciate baptism more as a result of this study?
2. Have you been baptized? When? If you were baptized as a believer, what was the effect of the baptism on your Christian life (if any)?
3. Read **Acts 19.1-5**. How many baptisms are there? When, if ever, should someone be rebaptized? (See also **Ephesians 4.5; Romans 6.3-4; Galatians 3.26-28**)
4. When baptisms occur in your church, are they a time of rejoicing and praise to God? What do you think is happening to the person being baptized at that moment?

### scenario:

A friend of yours has confessed to being a Christian for many years, yet, they have never been baptized. When you inquire as to why, they argue that they don't need to "prove" their faith to anyone publicly—Jesus knows. How would you respond?

### Communion

5. What has been your experience with the Lord's Supper in the past?
6. What things symbolized by the Lord's Supper have received new emphasis in your thinking as a result of hearing today's sermon?
7. Will you approach the Lord's Supper differently now? Which of the things symbolized in the Lord's Supper is most encouraging to your Christian life right now?
8. Read **1 Corinthians 11.27**. Discuss what you think it means to "eat or drink" in an unworthy manner? How does this relate to our approach to worship overall (See **Matthew 5.23-24**)?

### scenario:

You bring a friend to church who you know is not a Christian. Following the sermon, the pastor invites people to participate in Communion. He fails to inform those listening that Communion is for repentant believers. As you go up for Communion, your friend follows and also participates. What would you say to your non-Christian friend? What if your friend was an unrepentant Christian?



## 1. sermon notes

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# The Statements: our beliefs

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## MISSION OF THE CHURCH

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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 28.19-20**

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## GO THEREFORE

The word GO reminds us that building a community of believers has a purpose: it is a means to an end, not the end in itself. Sometimes, however, we confuse church for the mission. The church does not have a mission, the mission has a church. God's mission has been the redemption of His people since time began. We do not separate ourselves from the world to avoid living worldly - which is disobedience to God. We do not ATTRACT. Like Jesus, we INCARNATE into the world, find where He is already at work, and join forces with Him.

## MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS

Our engagement of the world has a purpose. It has been said that "everything preaches." The truth of the gospel should permeate all that we do, from our advertising to our preaching. Jesus is the beginning and end of all things, the hero of every story, the aim of all of our efforts and praise. We are not saved by the gospel and then changed by obedience, but the gospel itself transforms us into a new creation (**2 Cor. 5.17**), is the way we grow (**Gal. 3:1-3**) and are renewed (**Col. 1:6**). It is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power through every barrier (**Rom. 1:16-17**).



## BAPTIZING THEM INTO THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

We are not in this alone. The purpose of proclaiming the gospel is not simply to call people to change, but to bring them into a new family (**Galatians 3.4-7**). This new family is unified by a shared purpose and belief in the redemptive work of the God (**Ephesians 4.3-6**). This family supports each other financially and spiritually (**Acts 2.42-45**), rejoicing with one another (**Romans 12.15**), and regularly meets (**Acts 2.46-47**) to distribute the sacraments and share in the benefits of the gathered saints (**Hebrews 10.24-25**).

## TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THAT I HAVE COMMANDED

God's objective in this life is to make us look more like Jesus. We aim to live like Jesus as he lived in and among the people. Specifically, we live NO MORE than Jesus and NO LESS than Jesus. By no more, we mean that we do not build self-righteous rules that are simply attempts to work our way back to Jesus and minimize the need for the atonement. We also recognize God will not accept less than Jesus and requires perfection. In our dependence upon the cross alone and Jesus living in us (**Galatians 2.20**), avoid both self-righteousness and self-indulgence.



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## FAMILY TRAITS

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So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 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 2.19-22**

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### THE GOSPEL

The Bible is the final authority for faith and life; it is inerrant in its original writings, infallible, and God breathed. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is about the one story: God's redemption of mankind. The Gospel is the 'good news' of how God accomplished that redemption through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, became man without ceasing to be God. In love, he humbled himself, taking the form of a servant that he might redeem sinful, broken, rebellious men who desired evil continually. According to the Bible, he lived a sinless life glorifying God in perfect obedience. According to the Bible, he died the death we deserved saving us through his death on the cross; He died in our place, for our sins, as our substitutionary sacrifice, perfect and acceptable to God. According to the Bible, Jesus ensured our justification, conquering sin and death, through the literal physical resurrection from the dead three days later. We are, therefore, justified by grace alone, through faith alone in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus alone. On the cross, our old self dies and we are raised to new transformed life as one cleansed of sin, reconciled with God, adopted into His family, imputed with perfection, desiring to worship our King, Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus then dwells in our hearts, ceaselessly conforming us more and more into His image until we see Him again.



## GOSPEL TRUTH

Gospel truth brings God and His Word to the people. God's Word distinguishes the Christian message from other religions, philosophies, or ideologies that make truth claims about meaning and purpose. Gospel truth is not another ideological alternative; it is submission to the absolute truth of God foundational to all of life. Gospel truth is not purely a set of historical facts, it is truth personified in a man. Gospel truth is news of what God has done to accomplish salvation through Jesus Christ in history. Gospel truth helps us to grow in every way, empowers us to overcome any barrier, and equips us to solve every problem we encounter.

### GOSPEL COMMUNITY

Gospel community brings people to God. God creates men and women in his image to live in community together, imitating the eternal relationship shared by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Gospel Community is a gathering of people in loving submission to one another, fulfilling their God-intended role to serve as unto the Lord. Gospel Community proclaims their faith in Gospel Truth by how they actively love through fellowship, ministry, and discipline. Gospel Community is where the world hears about the love of God, where it sees the love for God, and where it experiences the love of God's people as they are invited to belong before they believe. Gospel Community exists as an expression of God's Kingdom on earth.

### GOSPEL LIVING

Gospel Living brings God's Lordship to our lives. God conforms us to the image of His Son, calling us to a life in total submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Gospel living is a life of self-denial lived for the approval of God, not men. Gospel Living is a life of humility, sacrificing the pleasures of the world to love and serve. Gospel Living is a life of continuous worship, glorifying God in everything big and small. Gospel living is a life on mission, fulfilling His call to go into the world and make disciples. Gospel Living is a life where Jesus is the supreme hope and joy in all of life and death.



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## ELDER QUALIFICATIONS

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... appoint elders in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as

God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

**Titus 1.5-9**

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### Calling

All Elders or potential Elders must demonstrate clearly and persuasively to the existing Elders that they have been called by the Holy Spirit to the office of Overseer. This might be accomplished through expression of aspiration/desire to this office and/or by personal testimony of God's leading in their life. There is a difference between a Holy Spirit initiated calling and a man-inspired desire. Before confirmation as an Elder, this calling must be evident and confirmed.

### Character

To be considered for eldership, a man must exhibit the highest of Christian character according to the qualifications of Scripture (**1Timothy 3.1-7, Titus 1.5-9**)

#### 1. Relation to God

- A man – masculine leader
- Above reproach – without any character defect
- Not a new convert – mature in the faith

#### 2. Relation to Family

- Husband of one wife – a one-woman man; sexually pure
- Has obedient children – successful father as prophet, priest, and king
- Manages family well – provides for, leads, organizes, loves

#### 3. Relation to Self

- Temperate – mentally and emotionally stable
- Self-controlled – disciplined life of sound decision-making



- Not given to drunkenness – without addictions
- Not a love of money- Financially content, responsible, and upright

#### 4. Relation to Others

- Respectable – worth following and imitating
- Hospitable – welcomes strangers, non Christians for evangelism
- Not Violent – even tempered
- Gentle – kind, gracious, loving
- Not Contentious – peaceable, not quarrelsome or divisive
- Good reputation with others – respected by non-Christians

### Competency

The Scriptures demonstrate that Elders serve by leading and their primary responsibilities involved the spiritual oversight of the congregation. In addition to being called and qualified, an elder must competently and consistently accomplish the biblical duties of an elder/pastor which include:

- Prayer and Scripture study (**Acts 6.4**)
- Ruling and Leading the church (**1Timothy 5.17**)
- Managing the church (**1Timothy 3.4-5**)
- Caring for people in the church (**1Peter 5.2-5**)
- Giving account to God for the church (**Hebrews 13.17**)
- Living exemplary lives (**Hebrews 13.7**)
- Rightly using the authority God has given them (**Acts 20.28**)
- Teaching the Bible correctly (**Ephesians 4.11, 1Timothy 3.2**)
- Preaching (**1Timothy 5.17**)
- Praying for the sick (**James 5.13-15**)
- Teaching sound doctrine and refuting false teachings (**Titus 1.9**)
- Rightly using money and power (**1Peter 5.1-3**)
- Protecting the church from false teachers (**Acts 20.17-31**)
- Disciplining unrepentant Christians (**Matthew 18.15-17**)



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## CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

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So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 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.

**Titus 1.5-9**

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### What are the benefits of membership at Communion Church?

- 1. You have the benefit of accountability to spiritual leaders.** Every believer is called to *obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls (Heb. 13.17)*. This command assumes that you have a covenant with certain spiritual leaders. They are responsible for you and you to them.
- 2. You shamelessly identify with Christ or his people (Mark 8.38).** Our hope is that you can speak with confidence and love about your identification with Christ and His church community. We all desire to see people share, talk about, and stand for Jesus.
- 3. You encourage other believers to commit to the local body versus consume (Heb. 10.24).** We believe it is a good thing to encourage commitment. Asking people to make a covenant encourages them to take their participation in the body seriously by owning it.
- 4. You stop being an independent Christian (Matt. 18.15-17; Heb. 13.17).** Community is a core value because God's very nature declares it. The early chapters of Genesis declare that we are not made to be alone. As a part of our community, you have a family there to love you, cry with you, laugh with you, and serve you.
- 5. You participate in a stronger more unified effort of God's people.** **Ecclesiastes 4.9** teaches that TWO people can accomplish more than TWICE as ONE. There is strength in numbers. There are very few things, if any, that are ever accomplished by one person. God has called a people, not a person, to join his mission. If we are to fulfill the calling of Jesus, we need each other.



- 6. You may have opportunity lead church ministries or serve as a church leader.** You will not find a verse that says you must be a member to lead a Bible study. It does say, however, that pastors must watch over and protect the flock from false teachers and false doctrine. Membership is one means through which we can protect the purity of the word and the church.
- 7. You have greater opportunities to use your spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4).** In other words, you openly manifest the reality of the Body of Christ (**1 Cor 12.27**). As part of the body of Christ, you serve a particular purpose. Without you we're missing parts! The body might function, but it certainly is not robust. When you are using your God given skill, gift, talent or resource for the body, you are fulfilling God's ideal for His community.

### What are the covenant membership commitments?

Covenant membership at Communion Church means that you have committed yourself to our family of believers — that you have agreed to participate as fully as you are able in the life, ministry and government of our church. Members must affirm the following promises as a vow unto the Lord:

- 1.** You acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope except through his sovereign mercy.
- 2.** You believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel? (You must seek to grow into the likeness of Christ, not through proud self-reliance, but through constant repentance and reliance on the Holy Spirit.)
- 3.** You now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as a follower of Christ.
- 4.** You covenant to support the Church in its God-glorifying worship and work to the best of your ability.
- 5.** You submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to strive for its purity and peace.



# different kinds of churches

## 15 important definitions

1. "Catholic" Church: The phrase "catholic" church is different than the phrase the "Roman Catholic" Church. The Roman Catholic Church is characterized by an episcopal hierarchy with the pope as its head and belief in seven sacraments and the authority of tradition which came to prominence under Rome (esp. under Constantine). The term "catholic", however, was first used by Iganitius of Antioch who died in 110 AD. It also appears in the historical Nicene Creed, which identifies the church as catholic (325 AD). Rooted in the Greek term *katholikos*, the word meant that which is universal or general. It was a term used to not only defend orthodoxy, but also as a means of expressing the international and cross-cultural nature of the church.
2. Charismatic Church: A charismatic church is often used synonymously with the Pentecostal movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Such self-described churches typically emphasize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit as exemplified in the New Testament church (tongues, gifts of healing miracles, prophecy, etc.). Some churches over-emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit at the expense of Jesus. Some non-charismatic churches avoid talking about the Holy Spirit altogether. The term "charismatic" can carry both positive and negative connotations depending on its usage in context.
3. Church Planting Church: The book of Acts records the growth of the church through church planting. A church planting church is a church that holds church planting as a value in that it is a powerful and effective way to reach the lost. Genuine church planting churches have actions that accompany the value either by planting churches or partnering with those who do.
4. Denominational Church: A church that is governed by one of many organized subgroups in the Christian faith. Usually such churches are not autonomous but administered by a larger body. Though many of these groups share in essential theology, each of them possess a unique name, identity, and traditions.
5. Emergent Church: Emergent is an official organization in the U.S. and the U.K. "Emergent Village", the organization, is directed by Tony Jones, a Ph.D. student at Princeton Theological Seminary. Several teachers affiliated with this group include Doug Pagitt, Chris Seay, Tim Keel, Karen Ward, Ivy Beckwith, and Brian McLaren. Often these groups emphasize culture over church and thus allow culture to redefine what their community and even their gospel looks like. They emphasize a lifestyle of worship where how they live is MORE important than what they believe. This perspective has led most in the Emergent movement to a denial of truth, or some as far
6. Emerging Church: Many have used Emerging and Emergent as synonyms—both terms are probably overused. Some, however, have noted a difference between the terms identifying *emerging* is a wider, informal, church-based, global movement. There are many forms these churches take. While it is often difficult to distinguish what is what, the positive connotations of this unofficial movement describe churches that believe church cannot pretend like it is 1950 anymore. While holding firmly to orthodox theology, including ecclesiological forms, they walk the line between sectarianism (separated to far from culture) and syncretism (immersed too far into culture) in an effort to contextualize the gospel and reach today's culture without compromising the truth.
7. Evangelical Church: The term evangelical has its historical roots in the Greek word for "gospel" or "good news". An evangelical church, therefore, is a church that believes and proclaims the truth of Jesus life, death, and resurrection. Historically, evangelicalism has been viewed as the middle ground between fundamentalists and liberals. At the core, an evangelical church believes transformation and continued reformation comes through the message of the gospel.
8. Heretical Church: A church that, though it identifies itself as Christian, has abandoned historical orthodox theology. Typically, such a church becomes polarized around an individual and the authority of Scripture no longer governs the church.
9. House/Home Church: A house or home church is an independent assembly of Christians who gather in a home. Such churches were present in the New Testament and are especially effective in contexts where the Christian faith is persecuted. There has been a recent growth in the number of home churches in North America and elsewhere. Some contemporary writers have argued that the home is the "right" place to meet and that it is more effective in engaging our current culture and building authentic community. In truth, house churches work effectively, or not, in various contexts. Depending on what occurs at the specific houses, there are those that are *biblical churches* and those that are *unbiblical groups* that pretend they are.
10. Invisible Church: The church as God sees it.



11. **Missional Church:** This church has a biblical mission. This is the church that God first founded in Acts. The missional church focuses on fulfilling the Great Commission to grow the church, the Great Commandment to ensure health, and mission Dei to preach the gospel to the world. Driven by a firm theological understanding of Christ (Christology) and His Church (Ecclesiology), this church lives out its mission by actively contextualizing the truth in the most effective forms and strategies to reach the place God has sent them. Sanctified by truth of Scripture, this process requires self-denial, and sacrifice, as we seek to live like Jesus and dwell in the world. The focus is on communicating the Gospel in word and deed to the community and the world. A missional church is an Acts 1:8 church; it's a church that seeks to become like the church in Acts 2.
12. **Non-Denominational Church:** An autonomous church that is not affiliated with a particular organization or governing body with agreed identity, theology, and traditions. These churches are often, but not always, identified as "Community" Churches, "Bible Churches" or the like.
13. **Prosperity Church:** A prosperity church is a church that preaches a false gospel of prosperity. Prosperity theology falsely teaches that God intends to bless those he "favors" through wealth, health, or other material success. The prosperity gospel is often used by its false teachers to elicit donations, on the premise that donations (sow a seed) will be materially repaid and rewarded through divine intervention. Not only does it create a false hope for those who adhere to the teachers, but perpetuates a way of living for which Jesus himself did not qualify.
14. **Reformed Church:** Theologically, a reformed church is a church that is characterized by a belief in biblical doctrine best expressed by the system of doctrine called Calvinism as well as confessions like the Westminster Confession of Faith. Additionally reformed churches are committed to "semper reformanda", or always reforming what we do in accordance with Scripture.
15. **Visible Church:** The church as Christians on earth see it.

# additional resources

## THE CHURCH

*The Church*, Edmund Clowney

*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, Mark Dever

*Why we love the Church*, Kevin DeYoung & Ted Kluck

## THE DOCTRINE

*Salvation belongs to the Lord*, John Frame

*Christian Beliefs*, Wayne and Elliot Grudem

*The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin

## THE LEADERS

*Biblical Eldership*, Alexander Strauch

*Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons*, Thabiti Anyabwile

*Ministries of Mercy*, Tim Keller

## THE COVENANT

*What Is a Healthy Church Member?* Thabiti Anyabwile

*What Does God Want of Us Anyway?* Mark Dever

*The God who is There*, DA Carson

## THE SACRAMENTS

*Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, Gospel Coalition

*Knowing Christianity*, JI Packer

*Gospel Wakefulness*, Jared Wilson

[www.comunionchurch.org](http://www.comunionchurch.org)



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