

## Lesson 4 - SCF New Believer's Course: Church, Life Groups, Tithing and Communion.

To begin with it is important to note that the meaning of the word church is much more than a reference to a building for religious purposes.

In the New Testament context, the word is employed in four senses:

1. It represents the body of Christ **worldwide**, over which the Lord functions as head (Mt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22; 1 Tim. 3:15).
2. The expression can refer to God's people in a given **region** (Acts 9:31, ASV, ESV).
3. Frequently, it depicted a **local congregation** of Christians (1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:11).
4. It could also signify a group of the Lord's people **assembled** for worship (1 Cor. 14:34-35).

(Ref: <https://christiancourier.com/articles/what-is-the-meaning-of-ekklesia>)

So when speaking of the church we are talking about those who belong to Jesus Christ, who have made him their Lord and Saviour.

Together, as a whole, we are also personified as the bride of Christ.

### **The Church – the Bride of Christ:**

**Ephesians 5: 25-27** *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*

**Rev 19 7-9** *Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!*

*For the wedding of the Lamb (Jesus) has come, and his bride has made herself ready.*

### **The Church – the Body of Christ:**

**1 Cor 12:27** *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

**1 Cor 12:12-26** *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<sup>[c]</sup> 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 honourable we treat with special honour. 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 honour 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 honoured, every part rejoices with it.

**The Church- the Family of Christ:**

**Eph. 1:5** God's unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave Him great pleasure.

**1 Peter 1:3** God has given us the privilege of being born again so that we are now members of God's own family.

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His love for us, his followers is absolute and all the verses above demonstrate to us the importance of meeting and working with each other in God's kingdom. We are not solo fliers separate from other believers. It makes no sense for followers of Jesus to feel that they can do their journey with him isolated from other believers.

**Heb. 10:25** actually reminds us to gather together regularly: "*And **let us not neglect\*** our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.*"

**Becoming a disciple of God's is, and always has been, a team sport, a group activity, a family affair, a community event. New disciples called to follow Jesus were not given the option to follow alone but rather joined with the group of other disciples.**

**At SCF we gather together regularly each Sunday as a whole body of believers to celebrate and worship our God together, to study his word together, to pray together and to serve each other. This can be likened to a one's own extended natural family coming together and Jesus himself regularly attended the synagogue in his time here on earth.**

**Jesus also modelled to us the importance of gathering together in smaller groups, in the manner in which he moved around with a set of 12 close disciples that were his constant companions. At SCF we call these smaller groups Life Groups, and these Life Groups provide a much more conducive environment for forming closer relationships with others on a deeper level which can be hard to achieve in the large Sunday gathering.**

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## Two celebrations that are held in our Sunday Services:

1. **TITHING:** Tithing is when we choose to give to God 10% of our weekly earnings – either through a direct debit to the church or in cash during the Sunday Service. This is simply to acknowledge to God that we confirm that everything that we have here on earth comes from his hand of provision to us, that it doesn't actually belong to us – hence we are only returning to Him a small portion of the total of everything that He gives to us. This is explained in the bible in several places:

*Leviticus 27:30* A tithe (meaning tenth) of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord: it is holy to the Lord.

*Deuteronomy 14:22* You must tithe all of your crops every year. Bring this tithe to eat before the Lord your God at the place he shall choose as his sanctuary; this applies to your tithes of grain, new wine, olive oil, and the firstborn of your flocks and herds. The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your lives...<sup>27</sup> Don't forget to share your income with the Levites in your community for they have no property or crops as you do, or give it to foreigners, or to widows and orphans within your city so they can eat and be satisfied and then Jehovah your God will bless you and your work.

*Numbers 18:21* I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting.

The Levites were one of the twelve tribes of Israelites, a priestly tribe, who were set apart to serve God in the oversight of the maintenance of the tabernacle and in the undertaking of the worship services in firstly, the moveable tabernacle tent, and later the permanent structure of God's temple that King Solomon built. The remaining eleven tribes were to bring a tenth of their income as both an acknowledgement to God of his provision, and as a practical support to their Israelite brothers who, because of their specialised service to God and to their brothers, were unable to tend to flocks or work at creating income sources for themselves. Hence today, a portion of the tithes collected from the church go towards supporting those who have given up other employment to serve the church, as well as using the tithes for the expenses of renting facilities and office costs etc.

Even towards the close of the Old Testament after the Israelites had returned from captivity, God continued the requirement of tithing witnessed in his reprimand to them for withholding their tithe from the temple.

**Malachi 3: 8** *"Will a man rob God? Surely not! And yet you have robbed me," says the Lord Almighty. "What do you mean? When did we ever rob you?"*

*"You have robbed me of the tithes and offerings due me. And so the awesome curse of God is cursing you, for your whole nation has been robbing me. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so that there will be food enough in my Temple; if you do, I will open up the windows of heaven for you and pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough to take it in!"*

In the New Testament too, Jesus continues to confirm that the practise of tithing is one which is expected by God his father in **Matthew 23:23:** *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."*

## OFFERINGS

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Offerings are freely given gifts, separate to the tithe, and determined by the giver:

**2 Corinthians 9:6** Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. <sup>7</sup>Each of you should give what **you** have decided in **your heart** to give, **not reluctantly or under compulsion**, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup>And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

At SCF we have a monthly focus for our offerings which are given to causes both locally and globally, including the support of missionaries who live and work in Vietnam and the Ukraine.

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### **2. COMMUNION: Communion is a special liturgical act in which we eat a small cracker and drink a small cup of juice as we remember the death of Jesus on our behalf. The following verses explain the meaning of this ritual.**

1 Cor. 11: 23-34 *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>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.

Well we are not really in danger of filling our stomachs when we take communion today as our emblems have become a thin wafer and thimble full of juice! The point though is to take communion very thoughtfully, prayerfully and intentionally, not as a mindless ritual. Some points to ponder are:

- **We are to examine ourselves.** God wants us to use the Lord's Supper as a time of repentance. 1 Corinthians 11:28 says, "**You should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup**" (NLT). As you hold the cup and the bread, even then, you should inspect your thoughts and motivations and actions and take the time to ask for forgiveness eg.

- Have you truly surrendered to Jesus Christ as the Master and Lord of your life?
- Are you treating those in your life with kindness, humility, gentleness, respect and love? How are you treating your parents, children, people you work with or go to school with?
- Is there anyone you have hurt and need to ask their forgiveness for? If there is, then you need to make it right as soon as you can.

Matt 5: 23-24 *“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”* As you remember the death of Christ and think about how it restored and reconciled you to God, it should drive you to restore and reconcile with others.

- **“For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death...”** (NLT). The message of the cross and the Lord’s death is not only for us to remember, but it is for us to proclaim, preach, teach, share, and testify. The Lord’s Supper is really an act of proclamation. When you participate in it you are saying I believe Jesus died for my sins. I believe He rose again. I believe that my sins have been paid for by the death of Jesus Christ on that cross. I believe I have eternal life because of Christ. When you take the Lord’s Supper you are making a statement to those sitting around you that you are a follower of Christ and you are not ashamed of Jesus.
- When Jesus tells us to **“do this to remember Me”** He is telling us to think about the sacrifice He paid, the pain He went through for us, the greatness of Him taking up the cross that should have been for us. He wants us to remember this because it reminds us of how much He loves us. He wants us to look back and remember.
- **We are to look ahead and rejoice.** The Lord’s Supper brings our attention to the fact that someday Christ will return to gather His people together. Look carefully at verse 26, **“For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death until He comes again”** (NLT). We proclaim the cross of Calvary every time we take the Lord’s Supper, but it is always in the shadow of Christ coming back.

(Ref: <https://truthappliedjs.com/1-corinthians-1123-34-purposes-of-the-lords-supper/>)