



THE JOURNEY

from Creation to New Creation

Part 14 God's New Humanity

Introduction

These notes give some guidance on how to lead the group through the questions and discussion. *The additional Bible references in the notes give more details that you may find useful.*

You may want to begin by asking if anything particularly struck people as they watched the video. However, it would be wise to limit this part of the discussion to ten minutes at most.

Read Acts 2.42, Acts 13.1-3, 1 Corinthians 14.1-5, 26, 1 Timothy 4.13, Hebrews 10.24-25.

Question 1

What is the purpose of our church gatherings?

Acts 2.42 seems to suggest a broad outline for what happens in our gatherings – “teaching”, “fellowship”, “breaking of bread”, and “prayers”. The word “fellowship” translates the Greek word *koinōnia*. This word suggests partnership in something done together.

What should a gathering of the local church include? There might be teaching and public reading of the Scriptures. There may be praise, thanksgiving and adoration of God – both spoken and sung. There may be prayer for the needs of people or situations. There may be prophecy, messages of wisdom or knowledge, words of encouragement, tongues and interpretations. There might be testimonies – that is, people sharing what God has done for them. Not all these things will necessarily occur in every gathering. Each time we meet will be a unique occasion. And there may be times when the main focus of the meeting is, for example, prayer or teaching.

Everything that takes place when we meet together should build up the body. Paul writes: “Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.” (1 Corinthians 14.26 NIV). For example, too, those that prophesy, do so for believers’ “upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.” (1 Corinthians 14.3). It seems clear from the New Testament that there

should generally be opportunity for a variety of people to contribute. We can *all* take part in encouraging and building up our fellow-believers.

The Lord's Supper is central to the life of a local church. It's a shared meal that celebrates the new covenant between God and His people (prophesied in Jeremiah 31.31). This new covenant was sealed with Jesus's blood. Through His blood – in other words, His sacrificial death – Jesus paid the penalty and made full amends for our sin. Now we can come into relationship with God. We can be bound to Him by the New Covenant.

In the Lord's Supper, the bread symbolises Jesus's body given for us. The wine symbolises His blood shed for us. When we eat the bread and drink the wine, we remember that it was His death that enabled us to be in covenant relationship with God – and to enjoy all the blessings that this brings.

All believers are bound to God by His New Covenant. And that means we're bound to each other, too. We are one body. The Lord's Supper is a time of fellowship with God. *And* it's also a time of fellowship with each other. The Lord's Supper provides an opportunity for believers to reflect on their relationship with God and with other believers. Are they really living according to the terms of the New Covenant, loving and obeying God, and loving and serving their fellow-believers?

Read Exodus 40.34-35, 1 Kings 8.10-11, John 14.23, 1 Corinthians 3.16-17, 1 Peter 2.4-5.

Question 2

The Church is God's temple. What implications does that have for our lives?

The church is God's temple - the place where God lives. Each believer is a temple – as Paul tells us: “*your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you*” (1 Corinthians 6.19). God lives within them (John 14.16-17, 23). The whole Church, too, is a temple (1 Corinthians 3.16-17, 2 Corinthians 6.16, Ephesians 2.21-22).

God is holy (for example, Leviticus 11.44-45, Isaiah 6.3). His holiness is more than His moral purity; it is the sum of His divine attributes that sets Him apart from everything that He has made. He is the Uncreated, eternal, transcendent, divine Being, overwhelmingly and awesomely glorious in majesty. He is absolutely separate from evil, infinitely perfect, immaculately pure, faultlessly righteous. Central to God's holy being is love – perfect, pure love.

When the Tabernacle was complete, *“Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”* (Exodus 40.35). God's glory filled the Temple, too, at its dedication ceremony (1 Kings 8.10-11). Remember, too, Mount Sinai quaked and smoked as God descended on it (Exodus 19.18). Now God lives in each believer, and among us as a local church! The lesson is clear: *we, and our church, must be in a state fit for God to live amongst us.* In other words, we have to be holy. Peter writes: *“... as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”* (1 Peter 1.15-16).

God is uniquely holy in a way that is totally unattainable by any created being. But we believers are holy, too, in the sense that *we now belong to God.* We are His own special, distinctive people, set apart for His purposes. God made us believers holy (or, to use another Bible word, *“sanctified”* us) the moment we became a child of God. We're *“sanctified in Christ Jesus”* (1 Corinthians 1.2).

Yet becoming holy (in other words, our sanctification) is also a process that continues throughout our lives. We're to turn away from sin and pursue godliness. We have to put off our old way of life – our wrong attitudes, wrong ways of thinking and speaking, and sinful habits. New attitudes, right ways of thinking and speaking, and godly habits, need to be formed (see Ephesians 4.21-24, Colossians 3.5-17). God's Holy Spirit guides us and gives us the power to do all this. But we must co-operate with Him and obey Him. As we obey Him, His Spirit purifies us, so that all that we think and say and do reflects more and more exactly the character of the holy God Who lives in us.

A vital part of our obedience to God is this: we're to read the Bible and pray regularly, and meet often with other believers (see Hebrews 10.24-25). These things will strengthen us and help us to live holy lives.

Holiness means *to belong to God for His purposes.* Our purpose as God's people is to be a community of people who extend His Kingdom across Earth through the power of His Spirit. Each believer has a special role in this magnificent calling. But to fulfil our role,

we must be holy. *So you can see how crucial our own personal holiness is to God's plan for this world.*

Read **Romans 12.3-8, 1 Corinthians 12.12-27, Ephesians 2.19-22.**

Question 3

What do these three images of the Church – a human body, a temple, a household - have in common? And what is the significance of this for our corporate life as a church?

Three ways in which the Church is pictured in the Bible are as a temple, a body, and a household. A temple is a single structure made up of many different components. A body is a single organism comprising a complex assembly of cells, tissues and organs, each of which has a part to play in the health and function of the whole body. A household is an economic and socially interdependent group of people who share a common life.

Each of these three images implies an integrated, interdependent community. Why is there such emphasis on community and interdependence? Because that's how God made us. As we saw in Session 3, mankind isn't just a group of unrelated individuals. The human race is a family, all descended from Adam and Eve. We're all connected. John Donne wrote: *“No man is an island, entire of itself. . . .”* At the heart of our beings is the capacity for love. We are relational beings. Donald Macleod wrote: *“A life lived apart from community is a life that violates human nature”.*

So when God speaks about the Church as a temple, a body, and a household, it isn't a completely new idea. He built the idea of community into human nature right from the beginning. The Church is God's new humanity. The Church is a community of people who love each other, support each other and share their lives with each other. When people see a local church functioning as a community as God intended, they are seeing what it really means to be human.

And all this means that we affect one another – for good or bad. ● We have the power to be a blessing to each other. In the church, God has given each of us gifts to build up our brothers and sisters in Christ (see 1 Corinthians 14.12,26, and see also Ephesians 4.11-16). ● Conversely, we have power to harm each other. Failing to use my gifts damages the body. One person's sin can defile many (compare Hebrews 12.15). We hurt people by breaking off relationships, or refusing to forgive.