

The church: function and form and indispensibility

Additional study material

A discipleship training to equip
Christians for works of service,
so that the Body of Christ may
be built up (Ephesians 4:11-16).

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A. THE MEANING OF THE WORD "CHURCH"

1. The English word "church".

The word "church" in the English language is derived from the Greek word *kuriakon*¹ *doma* and means *the Lord's house*. The word "church" in the original language of the Bible (Greek) is *ekklèsia*² and has several different meanings:

2. The Greek word "ekklèsia" in the sense of a gathering or meeting of people.

Ekklesia is the assembly of a political body.

Ekklesia means *an assembly*, a regularly summoned legal or political body (Acts 19:39).

Ekklesia is the gathering of people.

Ekklesia means *a gathering or meeting of people* (Acts 19:32,41).

Ekklesia is the congregation of Israelites.

Ekklesia means *the congregation of Israelites* (!), especially when gathered for religious purposes (Judges 20:2; 2 Chronicles 29:28; Psalm 22:22; Psalm 107:32; Acts 7:38). Note that in the Old Testament Israel is called "the church"³ and is led by "a council of elders"⁴ (literally: elders seated as teachers and judges)! And in the New Testament Christians are also called "the church" and are led by "a council of elders" (1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Timothy 4:14).

3. The Greek word "ekklèsia" in the sense of a congregation of Christians.

Ekklesia means the congregation consisting of Christians.

The *context* of the word determines which aspect of the Christian congregation is meant.

Ekklesia is the gathering or meeting of a local Christian congregation.

(1 Corinthians 11:18; 14:19; 3 John 6).

Ekklesia is the congregation as the totality of Christians living in one place.

- Ekklesia in the singular

(Matthew 18:17; Acts 5:11; 8:3; 1 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 4:15; possibly 1 Timothy 5:16). "In every single congregation"⁵ (Acts 14:23).

- Ekklesia in specific mentioned cities:

Jerusalem (Acts 8:1; 11:22); Antioch (Acts 11:26; 13:1); Cenchræe (Romans 16:1); Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2); Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:1); Ephesus (Revelation 2:1), etc.

- Ekklesia in the plural

(Acts 15:41; 16:5; Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 7:17; 2 Corinthians 8:18-24; 2 Thessalonians 1:4).

- Ekklesia in specific mentioned provinces:

Judea (Galatians 1:22; 1 Thessalonians 2:14); Galatia (Galatians 1:2; 1 Corinthians 16:1); Asia (1 Corinthians 16:19; Revelation 1:4); Macedonia (2 Corinthians 8:1).

Ekklesia is the local congregation in a house (a house church).

- In the house of Priscilla and Aquila in Rome (Romans 16:5) and in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:19).
- In the house of Nympha (Colossians 4:15).
- In the house of Philemon (Philemon 1:1-2).

Ekklesia is the worldwide Church

All Christians belong to the world-wide (universal) Church, the Body of Christ (Matthew 16:18; Acts 9:31; 1 Corinthians 6:4; 12:28; Ephesians 1:22; 3:10,21; 5:23-32; Philippians 3:6; Colossians 1:18,24; possibly 1 Timothy 5:16).

¹ The word "kuriakon" means "of the Lord" (Greek: kurios), thus the church belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, not to any one else!

² The word "ekklèsia" is derived from the words "ek" (out) and "kaleo" (to call), thus the church is God's "called out (of the world) people".

³ Greek: ekklèsia

⁴ Hebrew: be-mishab zeqinim; Greek: en kathedra presbuteron (the seat of the elders from where they teach and judge)

⁵ Greek: kata ekklèsian, distributive sense

Ekklesia is the local congregation or the worldwide Church specifically characterised.

The Greek word “ekklèsia” here has a special Christian colour and thus a specific meaning: “The church of God” (1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; etc.). “All the churches (congregations) of Christ” (Romans 16:16). “The church (congregation) of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:1). “In all the churches (congregations) of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:33). “All the churches (congregations) of the Gentiles” (Romans 16:4).

4. The word “church”, “congregation” or “assembly” in the Bible.

The Church is not an organisational unity, but a spiritual unity.

The Old Testament believers are called “an assembly” or “a Church”⁶ (Judges 20:2; 2 Chronicles 29:28; Psalm 22:22; Psalm 107:32; cf. Hebrews 11:10-16; 12:22-24). Also the New Testament believers are called “an assembly” or “a Church” (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 13:14)!

The lampstand in the Old Testament (Exodus 25:31-32).

During the Old Testament period there was only “one lampstand” in the temple and it had seven lamps on seven arms. Thus, during the Old Testament period the Congregation of Israel expresses its unity in “the Church-State of Israel”.

The lampstands in the New Testament (Revelation 1:20).

The New Testament believers belong to one Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), but also to many independent congregations (churches). During the New Testament period the unity of the New Testament Church is symbolised, not by one lampstand, but by Jesus Christ who is present and active in the midst of “seven lampstands”. These seven lampstands together represent all the local congregations in the whole world and throughout the whole New Testament period (Revelation 2:7). Thus, during the New Testament period all local Christian congregations (churches) express their unity, *not* in a visible organisation like “a Church-State” or “a particular denomination”, but in their spiritual unity with one another through Jesus Christ, who is present and active in their midst through his Holy Spirit!

In the Bible the Body of Christ consists of independent congregations that are organically (not: organisationally) united to Jesus Christ.

The image of the Church as “the Body” of Christ (Ephesians 4:12) and all Christians being “members” of that one Body point towards the fact that all Christian congregations (churches) are *organisationally independent* from one another, but *organically united* to Jesus Christ (the Head). All Christian congregations (churches) in the world can find their spiritual unity (and identity) only in Jesus Christ. All the members in that world-wide Body of Christ are *not* controlled by any other member (e.g. a leader like a pastor), but only by the Head, Jesus Christ. Therefore no member in the Body of Christ may lord it over other members of the Body (Matthew 20:25-27; 1 Peter 5:2-4). No so-called “mother church” may lord it over any so-called “daughter churches”!

In the Bible the Church is never a denomination, national church or ethnic church.

Nowhere in the Bible is there any mention of a number of local churches that have united to form “a denomination”. The modern existence of many “denominations consisting of a number of dependent local congregation (churches)”, subsequently spread to different countries in the world, has not a single biblical warrant! Nowhere in the Bible is there any proof that the Church was “a denomination” or “a state church” or “a national church” or even “an ethnic church”. The modern existence of a great number of “denominations”, even of “state churches”, “national churches” and “ethnic churches” has not a single biblical basis! Jewish and Greek Christians together formed local congregations (churches) in the province of Galatia (Galatians 3:28), in the province of Asia (Ephesians 2:11-22; Colossians 3:11) and in Italy (Romans 1:14-16).

In the Bible the Church never has an umbrella organisation.

Nowhere in the Bible does any independent local congregation (church) become dependent to “a denomination”! Nowhere in the Bible is there any evidence for “an umbrella organisation” (like councils, synods, bishoprics, classes, conferences, etc.) with a number of local congregations (churches) in submission to it.

In the Bible the Church is world-wide one flock, one body, one house, one nation.

Jesus Christ teaches very clearly, “I have other sheep (belonging to Gentile sheep pens) that are not of this sheep pen (the Jewish sheep pen). I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be ONE FLOCK AND ONE SHEPHERD” (John 10:18). And Jesus Christ says, “I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:20-21).

And the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul teaches, “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit into ONE BODY – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). The Bible says, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

⁶ Greek” ekklèsia

And the Holy Spirit through the apostle Peter teaches, “You also like living stones, are being built into A SPIRITUAL HOUSE to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ... You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:4-5,9-10).

5. The summary meaning of the word “ekklesia”.

“Ekklesia” as a congregation always means “an individual local congregation” in a specific place, except when it refers to “the Body of Christ” in the whole world. The Body of Christ is a spiritual reality.

The spiritual unity among the independent local congregations is maintained:

- by the Spirit of Jesus Christ
- by the truth of the Bible
- and by the consultation and cooperation between all the independent local congregations (churches).

B. FUNCTION AND FORM IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

What is the difference between functions and forms in the Christian Community (Church), thus creating a great diversity within the Christian Community (Church)?

1. Function and diversity.

How should the Christian Community (the Church) function?

The members of the Christian Community should accept diversity.

Although there is only *one Body* of Christ (the world-wide Christian Church), it consists of *many different members* (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

Diversity.

The diversity is due to members coming from every tribe and language and people and nation (Revelation 5:9). And the diversity is displayed in the different spiritual gifts, special functions (offices), tasks (ministries) and places in the Body.

Gifts.

The members of the Christian Community differ with respect to the different ordinary and extraordinary spiritual gifts that are given to them (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7,18,28).

Tasks.

The members of the Christian Community differ with respect to the different ordinary and official tasks (ministries) that God assigned to them (1 Corinthians 12:4,28; Mark 13:34). And they differ with respect to the different ways in which the Holy Spirit manifests his work through them in the Body (1 Corinthians 12:5-7). For example, two Christians have received the spiritual gift of teaching. God assigned (called) one person to serve as a teacher especially for children, while God assigned (called) another person to serve as a teacher especially for adults. One Christian manifests his teaching ability especially in drawing illustrations and telling good Bible stories, while the other Christian manifests his teaching ability especially in leading good Bible studies, etc.

Place.

The members of the Christian Community differ with respect to the different places they have been assigned in the Body (1 Corinthians 12:18). For example, two Christians have received the spiritual gift of mercy. God assigned (called) one person to help the poor members of his congregation, while God assigned (called) the other person to help the poor, the blind and the disabled in his local community or in a foreign community, etc.

Uniformity.

Spiritual uniformity leads to many unfilled gaps, to an incomplete congregation. If everyone is a teacher, then who will show mercy? Moreover, spiritual uniformity also leads to disunity, because many members cannot find room within that congregation to function with their service (spiritual gift, function or ministry). Social uniformity leads to discrimination and the exclusion of for example the poor and uneducated (James 2:1-10). Racial uniformity leads to racial discrimination (Acts 10:9-16,28,34-35). Cultural uniformity not only leads to the exclusion of people with another language and culture, but most often to the maintenance and even enforcement of sinful cultural patterns of the background culture, for example, instituting authoritarian leadership, demanding unqualified obedience to parents and older people and replacing clear biblical teaching by cultural traditions (Mark 7:15-13).

Diversity.

The characteristic of a genuine Christian Community is not uniformity, but diversity (1 Corinthians 12:14-20). This is true for the world-wide Church and the local congregation. Spiritual diversity can lead to real unity, because the service of every Christian is needed and every Christian needs the service of the others (1 Peter 4:10-11). Social diversity gives

the possibility for a ministry of sharing: the rich share their means and the poor share their faith (James 2:5). Racial diversity gives the possibility for missions (Acts 8:27-31; Acts 10:24-28,34-35). Cultural diversity gives the possibility for demonstrating the unity of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). The world-wide Church can only *do what it should do* if it possesses all those diverse members. And the world-wide Church can only *be what it should be* if all those diverse members are governed from one centre, namely her Head, Jesus Christ.

The members of the Christian Community should be mutually dependent.

In the Christian Community (the Church) there is no reason for inferior or superior feelings and evaluations. The eye needs the ear and the hand needs the foot. Each member is necessary for the functioning of the Christian Community. Each member should take initiative and show concern for the other members (1 Corinthians 12:21-27). That means that the members should fulfil the *one another responsibilities* to one another! They should fulfil these responsibilities not only towards members of their own local congregation, but also towards the members of the Body of Christ worldwide.

2. Function and form.

A diversity of historical forms in the Christian Community.

- The first congregation in Jerusalem expressed their fellowship by meeting together every day (Acts 2:42-46) instead of meeting together every week (Acts 20:7).
- They met together in the temple courts (Acts 2:42,46) instead of in a house (Romans 16:5).
- They expressed their breaking of the bread by combining it with their meals at home (Acts 2:42,46) instead of celebrating the Lord's Supper during a service of the congregation (1 Corinthians 11:17-22).
- They expressed their giving by having everything in common and sharing their plenty with those who had needs (Acts 2:44-45; Acts 4:34-35) instead of having regular collections (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
- They expressed their need to meet unexpected problems or challenges by choosing and appointing deacons to take care of those problems or challenges (Acts 6:1-7) instead of letting the ordinary believers do these tasks (Mark 13:34; 1 Peter 4:10-11).
- The followers of Christ baptised new believers in a house (Acts 9:17-18; Acts 10:47-48; Acts 22:16) instead of at a river (Mark 1:4-8).
- They greeted one another by giving one another a holy kiss (2 Corinthians 13:12).
- And they often followed the Old Testament custom of prayer by lifting up their hands (1 Timothy 2:8; cf. Psalm 134:2).

Note however that nowhere in the Bible are Christians taught or commanded to follow these same forms! Nowhere in the Bible are such forms enforced on Christians!

Traditional forms that no longer function must be re-evaluated.

Although every Christian function is expressed in some kind of form, every traditional form in the Christian Community should be evaluated on a regular basis. The forms given to biblical functions:

- should never violate Scripture (Matthew 15:1-9)
- should be meaningful
- should be expressed sincerely, not for the sake of appearance (Matthew 23:25-29) or for fear of being persecuted (1 Timothy 6:12-16)
- and may never be enforced on other Christians.

Instituting a single (authoritarian) person as the leader of the congregation (3 John 9-11) instead of a body of elders (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Timothy 4:14) violates the clear teaching of the Bible.

Enforcing a particular method of baptism with water violates the clear teaching of the Bible, because the Bible nowhere teaches a particular method of baptism.

Holding on to traditional music instruments when these no longer appeal to the younger generation, or continuing to make use of traditional liturgy which have become mechanical, or enforcing a particular dress code on members are examples of forms that need to change.

Historical forms that are biblical and appropriately adapted to the culture of the nation (contextualised).

The congregation should express its functions in biblical forms and at the same time in contemporary forms that are appropriately adapted to its culture without violating Scripture.

- A group with a common network of relationships (Acts 10:24,27).

The military centurion, Cornelius, invited the apostle Peter to come and speak in his house⁷ and he called together his relatives and close friends. This large gathering of Gentiles in Cornelius' house became the first Christian community or

⁷ Greek: oikos

congregation (house fellowship or house church) among the Gentiles. Which relatives, close friends, colleagues or neighbours of yours could you gather together in a house to hear the gospel?

- A group with a common social structure (Acts 16:13-15,29-34).

The apostle Paul spoke to people gathered outside at a riverside for prayer. Lydia became the first follower of Christ in Europe. The members of her “household”⁸ also became followers of Christ (Acts 16:13-15). Paul also spoke to a jailer in prison. The jailer with his whole household⁹ also became followers of Christ (Acts 16:29-34).

- A family or household

A family or household¹⁰ is a group of people with a common social structure that includes living together in the same place, working together (often as master and slaves, employer and employees), and worshipping together. Which homogeneous groups of people form a family or household in your area? (Students, military personnel, small entrepreneurs, young married couples, factory workers, hill tribe, minority group, etc). Which of these families or households could you approach with the gospel?

- A group interested to study and discuss the Bible (Acts 17:1-4; Acts 18:7-8; Acts 19:8-10).

As his custom was, Paul gathered a group of people at the local synagogue in order to discuss the Bible together for a number of weeks. His purpose was to persuade them to become followers of Christ. Which interested group of people at any church, other religious place or any place could you gather together to discuss the gospel in the Bible?

A group interested to listen to the preaching of God’s Word (Acts 18:7-8; Acts 19:8-10).

Guidelines for deciding which forms to use.

Which guidelines should determine the forms that the Christian Community chooses?

- Spirit and truth (John 4:19-24).

Jesus Christ announced that the time has come to express all forms of worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:19-24). The attitude with which the Christian’s *spirit* worships God must not be to make an outward display of their worship (cf. Isaiah 1:13-15), but to worship inwardly. He worships God inwardly by forgiving others, by surrendering his life, by dedicating his life, and by focussing on who God is and what God has done. And the attitude with which the Christian’s *mind* worships God must be in accordance with the truth that God revealed in the Bible.

- The Bible (1 Corinthians 4:6).

The apostle Paul applied the following rule to himself and to his co-workers, “Do not go beyond what is written (in the Bible).”

- The new covenant in the Bible (Hebrews 8:5-13).

What is written in the Bible reveals that the Bible is a progressive revelation. The old covenant (consisting of the Mosaic Law) has been made obsolete by the new covenant (in which the Law and the Prophets has been fulfilled). Therefore, *the Old Testament must always be interpreted in the light of the New Testament*. Many of the Old Testament functions and forms have been fulfilled and therefore cancelled and abolished (cf. Matthew 5:17; Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:15).

- The biblical instructions on conduct in the congregation (1 Timothy 3:15).

The apostle Paul has written very clearly how the people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household¹¹, which is the church or congregation¹² of the living God. He gave *instructions* on sound doctrine, on public worship and the relationship between men and women, on the appointment of the leaders of the congregation, on the responsibilities of the elders, on special groups within the congregation like the older women, slaves and the rich, and on pursuing godliness, righteousness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness (1 Timothy letter).

- The principle of what is beneficial and constructive (1 Corinthians 10:23).

Certain functions in the congregation are mandatory; others are permissible, but not necessarily compulsory. Although many functions and forms in the congregation may be permissible in every situation, they are not necessarily beneficial or constructive in every situation.

- The principle of calling or assignment (1 Corinthians 3:5-15; Mark 13:34).

Although the world-wide Church as a whole does all the functions, God’s calling limits every individual member to certain of these functions. He assigns to each his specific task.

Even a specific assigned function may have different forms due to differences in culture and commitment. For example, building on the foundation may be done with different materials like gold, silver or costly stones.

God’s calling is a responsibility, but at the same time a relief, because not every glorious opportunity needs to be pursued. We are allowed to limit ourselves. We are allowed to have a different function in the Body of Christ. And we

⁸ Greek: oikos

⁹ Greek: panoikei

¹⁰ Greek: oikos

¹¹ Greek: oikos

¹² Greek: ekklesia

are allowed to express that function in a biblical form, which is at the same time appropriately adapted to its culture (contextualised).

C. THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST IS INDISPENSIBLE

Is it possible for a Christian to grow and to serve as a believer without (outside) the Christian Church?

1. There are only two representatives of people on earth.

The two representative heads of all people on earth.

Read Romans 5:17-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22,45. Adam is the head of the body that represents all lost people (mankind). Christ is the Head of the Body that represents all saved people (the Church). Adam is the head of the human race in the whole world. Christ is the head of the world-wide Church and the head of every individual congregation in the whole world. The community of believers in the whole world is called “the Body of Christ” in the Bible (Ephesians 1:22) or the “one, worldwide Christian Church” in the Apostolic confession.

- **The first Adam (the first human being)**

He is the representative head of the old humanity, which consists of all the natural but fallen people everywhere in the world and throughout the history of the world.

- **The second Adam (Jesus Christ)**

He became the Representative Head of the new humanity, which consists of all the believers in the Messiah that was expected during the Old Testament period and all the believers in Jesus Christ during the New Testament period. Jesus Christ is the Representative Head of all believers in Jesus Christ everywhere in the world and throughout the history of the world. The whole purpose for which Jesus Christ came to the earth was to restore lost mankind to fellowship with the one and only God!

The body shares in the life of its head.

- **All people that are bound to the first Adam share in his fall into sin.**

The whole human race shares in the fall into sin of the first Adam. All people connected to the first Adam by human birth share in the sin (Job 14:4; Psalm 51:5), death (Romans 5:12,17) and condemnation (Romans 5:18) of the first Adam.

- **All people that are bound to the second Adam (Jesus Christ) share in his acquired righteousness.**

All Christians share in the righteousness (salvation), which Jesus Christ earned. All people connected to the second Adam are saved from God’s wrath and are reconciled to God (Romans 5:9-10). All people connected to the second Adam by spiritual rebirth share in the righteousness and new life of the second Adam (Jesus Christ)(Romans 5:14-19; 1 Corinthians 15:22).

2. There are only two communities on earth.

There are consequently only two communities of people in the world: unbelievers and believers. Every person belongs to one of these communities.

The community of unbelievers is called “the world”.

All unbelievers live under the influence of “the (wicked) world” (1 John 2:15-17). All unbelievers are ruled by “the dominion of darkness” (Colossians 1:13).

The community of believers in Jesus Christ is called “the Church”.

All believers belong to “the (world wide) Church” (Matthew 16:18) or “the Body of Christ” (Ephesians 5:23) or “the Kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25-26). The community of believers is not of the world, but is still in the world (John 17:14-16). And in the world, this community of believers is a light that shines in the darkness and salt that cleanses, preserves and gives taste (Matthew 5:14-16).

3. Assurance of salvation is experienced within the Body of Christ.

Salvation is possible only in Jesus Christ.

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we *must* be saved” (Acts 4:12). “If anyone is in Christ, he *is* a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17)! “He who has the Son *has life*. He who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11-13).

Assurance of salvation can only be experienced by a personal relationship with Christ.

“To be in Christ” has a spiritual and practical meaning.

Spiritually it means to possess the state of righteousness and holiness (1 Corinthians 1:30), which Jesus Christ has imputed (ascribed, credited) to the believer's account. The Holy Spirit continually applies this righteousness and holiness to the personal life of the believer (Romans 8:5-17; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

Practically it means to be in the Body of Christ, that is, to be connected to the one worldwide community of believers (the world-wide Christian Church). The Holy Spirit within the body of individual believers (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20) and in the midst of the Body of Christ (Ephesians 2:19-22) represents "the presence of Jesus Christ himself" in both!

Assurance of salvation can only be experienced by growing to spiritual maturity.

A Christian may be born-again (be an infant in Christ), but nevertheless does not experience assurance of salvation, because instead of growing to spiritual maturity, he is still drinking milk (the beginning teachings of the Christian Faith), is still quarrelling with other Christians and breaking up into church factions (denominations) and is still behaving like the non-Christians (1 Corinthians 3:1-4).

When a person receives Jesus Christ into his heart and life, he has become a child of God and knows that he has been born again (born of God) (John 1:12-13). But a Christian can only remain sure that God has called him and elected him, when he possesses the spiritual qualities in increasing measure. Only then will he be kept from being ineffective and unproductive. Only then will he never fall (back-slide) (2 Peter 1:8-11).

When a Christian grows to spiritual maturity (that is measured by the fullness of Christ) (Ephesians 4:13-14), he will no longer be an infant, tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

Assurance of salvation can only be experienced by functioning in the Body of Christ.

When a person is rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13), his being in the kingdom of Christ and functioning in the kingdom of Christ is the basis of his assurance of salvation. When a person is baptised by one Holy Spirit into the one Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), his being a part of the Body of Christ and functioning as a part of the Body of Christ (the Christian Church) is the basis of his assurance of participating in the new life of the Holy Spirit.

It is not only in the personal relationship of the believer with Jesus Christ, but also in his functioning within the Body of Christ (the community of believers) that the individual believer experiences assurance of his salvation. "He who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble" (1 John 2:9-10). It is not possible to separate the believer's relationship to the brother from his relationship to Christ. It is not possible to separate the Body of Christ from Jesus Christ, the Head of the Body. Likewise it is not possible to experience the assurance of salvation apart from functioning somewhere in the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ consists of the many congregations, house fellowships and personal relationships of Christians among one another.

The Body of Christ (the Church) is therefore the perfect gift of Jesus Christ to believers, whereby they not only experience that they are secure in Jesus Christ, but also experience that they have become actual partakers of the righteousness (salvation) and holiness which Jesus Christ earned and experience the significance and joy of being fellow-workers of God in his world-wide ministry.

4. Joining Christ is at the same time joining the Body of Christ.

"The new man" refers to Christ, the Christian or the Christian Church.

The expression "the new man" is used several times in the Bible. The context determines the meaning.

- **The new man refers to Christ (1 Corinthians 15:47).**

Adam is "the first man who came from the dust of the earth" and Jesus Christ is "the second man who came from heaven". Thus, the second or new man is Jesus Christ.

- **The new man refers to the Christian (Romans 6:2-7; Ephesians 4:20-24).**

"The old man" represents the unregenerate nature of the individual unbeliever. It is the natural man who has voluntarily chosen to be a slave of his sinful nature (Romans 6:16) and thereafter is completely dominated by his sinful nature (Romans 8:6-8).

"The new man" represents the regenerated nature of the individual believer. By faith the unregenerate nature has once-for-all-time been put off and the new nature has once-for-all-time been put on (Ephesians 4:22,24)! The old man and the new man do not and cannot exist together at the same time.

- **The new man refers to the Christian Church, the Body of Christ (Ephesians 2:15-16).**

Jesus Christ took the believers of the two former communities of Jews and Gentiles, who both come forth from Adam, and created in himself "one new man" out of the two. Thus he created the one Christian Church, the one Body of Christ consisting of all the believers in every nation of the world. In this one Body of Christ, he reconciles both Jewish

believers and Gentile believers to God and to one another. Here, *the new man* means more than the individual believer after he has been justified and sanctified. “The new man” is the one community of all the individual believers that have been justified and sanctified in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:15-16; cf. John 10:16). The new man is the Body of Christ, into which the Holy Spirit has baptized all the individual believers (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

Beyond the confines of *the one new man* (the Body of Christ, the world-wide Christian Church), there exists only *the old man* (the world, the old humanity with all its divisions). The individual believer cannot be a genuine part of Christ (the Head of the Body) apart from also being a genuine part of the Christian Community (the Body of Christ).

The putting off and putting on (Ephesians 4:22,24) is here not a process or a gradual growth, but a definite and once-for-all-time act of breaking with the sinful community (the world) and a definite and once-for-all-time act of joining the holy community (the Christian Church). It has the same meaning as once-for-all-time being transferred from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13). Note that Ephesians 4:1-16 speaks of the life in the Body of Christ, Colossians 3:9-11 speaks of the community (Body) consisting of Jews and Gentiles and Colossians 3:14 speaks of the one Body of Christ.

Becoming a new man is inseparable from Jesus Christ and inseparable from the Christian Church.

The fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form in Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:9). Likewise, the fullness of Jesus Christ dwells in the Body of Christ (the Christian Church)(Ephesians 2:22-23)! Only when individual believers are in Jesus Christ (the Head of the Body) and thus also in the Christian Church (the Body of Christ), they are being filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 3:7-21; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:1-3).

Conclusion.

The new man is both Christ and the Body of Christ. We cannot separate the Body of Christ from Christ. We cannot visualise Christ being in heaven only and the Body of Christ (the Church) being on earth only. We should think of the Christian Church, not primarily as an organisation of people, but rather as *an organism* consisting of one Body, the Body of Christ, which is inseparably connected to Christ, the Head of the Body! We should not think that we could have a personal relationship with Christ in heaven (the head of the Body) and at the same time refuse to be connected to the Body of Christ (the Church) on earth. To be “in Christ” includes being “in the Body of Christ” (in the Church).

5. Joining the Body of Christ means no longer living by oneself or for oneself.

Members of the Body (the Church) are inseparable from the Body.

“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ, we who are many form one Body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:4-5). When people become believers in Jesus Christ, they are baptised by one Holy Spirit into the one Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Thus, individuals are either still in the world outside the Body of Christ or they are in the Body of Christ! Individuals are either still under the dominion of darkness or in the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13). Individuals are either still a lost son or lost daughter wasting their lives in the world or they are members of the family of God. They are either still dead or they are made alive. They are either still lost or already found (Luke 15:11-24). The Body of Christ consists of the many local congregations, house fellowships (house churches) and personal relationships of Christians among one another.

Members of the Body (the Church) cannot function outside the Body.

Each individual believer can never transcend his own individuality. An individual Christian functioning as a hand can never take the place of another individual Christian functioning as an eye. The human hand and the human eye can only be what they are as long as they function in the human body. Likewise, the individual believer functioning as a hand or an eye can only be a true believer with his individual function as long as *he is connected as a living member to the Body of Christ*. Outside the Body of Christ, the believer cannot live and cannot function as a hand or as an eye! Just imagine a hand or an eye trying to exist and function without being connected to the rest of the body!

An individual that separates himself from the Body of Christ (the Church) cannot live the Christian life! The Christian life means that the individual believer no longer lives by himself or for himself, but rather that Christ lives his life in and through the believer (Galatians 2:20; Romans 8:10; 2 Corinthians 13:5). Christ lives his life in and through the individual believer only in fellowship with his Body (the one world-wide Christian Church in the world).