

## Church: The Household of God

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A surprisingly high number of people attend religious services in our secular age, roughly 70%. Why? Some want to meet people; others to go to heaven, or do some good. Each reason has something in common—*longing for meaning*—meaning in relationships, spirituality, service. In Christianity, meeting people in a meaningful way happens through life of the *Church*; true spirituality is through *Christ*, how we do good is *Mission*. Church, Christ, Mission. All good, but it's only half the picture. There's a near side and a far side to these. The near side of *Christ* his saving grace, the far side his divine lordship; the near side of *church* people who love and accept us, the far side people who challenge us to be holy; the near side of *mission* what we do for others, the far side what we tell them about God. Many of us are drawn to Christianity for the near side: sympathetic, saving messiah; a community of love; a mission of deeds. But if it's all you've got you probably won't stay. You certainly won't grow. We *need* the far side: Christ as Lord, Church as holy community, Mission with words. Over the next three weeks we'll look at Church, Christ, Mission, with special attention to the far side, what we might call the transcendent. This week *Church*.

### Household of God

We're going to drop down in vs 14-15 where we find three images of church, [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](#) (15). The first image comes from *oikos*, translated **house** or household. The early Christians gathered in homes, sometimes knocked out a wall, to accommodate up to 50 (so be grateful your CG isn't that big!). Why houses? Well, it's where people live, eat, share life. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul greets one of these, "[May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me](#)" (2 Ti 1:16). Onesiphorus' household was a place of mercy and hospitality. People connected there. Similarly our City Groups are meant to be little families that share life and are refreshed together. Someone who hosts a CG once told me, It's incredible what you get to witness in your own living room. You see people change in your house, create memories of deep connection, comfort in hardship, pray for one another. We need more houses, condos, apartments where the church can be refreshed. If you want to host let us know. Now, a

couple notes. These communities aren't disappointment-free. Any time you get a group of people together seeking meaningful connection disappointment is inevitable. Because everyone has deep longings but superficial understanding of one another. You've got to make an effort to get past the face in front of you. To get into the story behind, to ask one another questions, even the introverts. If we don't it bottlenecks on the social person, leader. Ask: *Can you tell me more? How did that make you feel? Why do you think that the case?* Questions get us past the face into one another's lives. Sometimes you like what you find sometimes you don't. That's the near side of church. What about the far side? Well, church isn't just a household; it's *the* household **of God**. In the OT, *oikos* is used of God's dwelling place. In [Isa 6 we see God sitting in the heavens on a cosmic throne, the earth is his footstool, and the train of his robe fills the oikos/house/temple](#). Which is why when God comes to earth, he creates temple-likeness. His encounter with Adam and Eve is in a garden-*temple*: serve as priests, angel with sword, one entrance, and his presence. When God meets with Israel it's in a temple-*garden*: one entrance, priests, the walls have angels and trees fruit carved into the walls, lights, water. And when he comes to dwell in us he makes a temple, [Do you not know that you \(pl\) are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells \(oikos\) in you?](#) (1 Co 3:16). What does this tell us about church? Why is it that every time God shows up his household looks like a temple? **Because the focus of the house isn't the people; it's the God**. A household that functions properly has God, not community, at its center. If that's true how would that change your approach to the community? We'd conduct ourselves like we live in a temple. We'd encourage holiness. Do you encourage others towards holiness? Do you ask questions, challenge assumptions, speak Scripture, and pray for one another's holiness? Do you welcome it? Holiness, by the way, isn't just getting away from sin; it's seeing how close we can get to God. How would that change your community? If our individual aim was closeness to God our experience of *his love, his joy, his acceptance, his mercy, his forgiveness, his presence*—would follow us into the into the community. We'd be less concerned about finding meaningful relationships and more concerned with making them. We'd meet to give not just to take, to serve not to judge. Disappointment goes down, satisfaction goes up. The whole temple would reverberate with holy, satisfied souls bursting to bless one another. That's what happens on the near side when we lean into the far side. When we pull back the curtain on

transcendence of God transformative community. But if we stay on the nearside, we settle for immanent, a house not a temple, shallow relationships not holy community. We expect people not God to fulfill us. Then it's only a matter of time till disappointment and frustration set in. Why? We've tried the near side without the far side, immanent without transcendent, church without God.

### **Church of the Living God**

The next image we find is *church of the living God*. This phrase picks up on the idea that God is alive. Unlike the physical idols and inert ideologies surrounding the Ephesians, God is not dead. The church isn't a lifeless institution but a lively community in which the Creator, Redeemer, and Consummator lives! But some live like he's dead. Consumed with our struggles, problems, responsibilities, we're lifeless navel-gazers. But the church of the *living* God teems with life! For a church that is alive, an alone person is an emergency—we greet them, know them, serve them. For a church that's alive, a need is an opportunity—we don't neglect needs or outsource them to leaders. We meet them. For the church that's alive, the transcendent informs the immanent, the far side invigorates the near side. We come to worship the God who lifts our burdens and rules the cosmos. We point one another to him, not ourselves. We text, How can I be praying for you this week, and we pray. You don't have to be the solution to everyone's problem. Why? It's church *of the living God*. He meets our needs. The church of the living God is alive because *God is* our life. Take that thing.

### **Pillar and Buttress of the Truth**

The final image is a pillar and buttress of the truth. Pillars and buttresses are supporting structures in a building. Paul probably has in mind the pillars of Solomon's temple. These twin pillars flanked the entrance. They were made of bronze and were roughly three stories high. At the top they were decorated with 100 pomegranates, inscribed with lilies, and each had a name: Jachin (he establishes), Boaz (he is mighty, 1 Ki 7:15). As you walked up, they signaled the presence of something truly great. See, the church has something so exquisite, so eternally precious, so magnificent that it offers way more than a *meaningful* life. It offers the truth. Truth that sets you free. Truth that confronts you. Truth that changes you. Truth that shows you what's inside the temple. When we move past the pillars, inside



we discover something utterly unexpected. Revelation describes the whole world as a new garden-city, *And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb* (Re 21:22). When the temple-likeness fades away we will be left with God and the Lamb. The object of soul's longing isn't meaning; it is a gentle, tender, sacrificial lamb who embraces death so we can enter his life, the dead, struggling, rejected can become the church of the *living* God. What we need, what this city needs, isn't ultimately a friendly church, better programs. What we need is the truth that God and the Lamb satisfy every human need. Will you tell one another the truth or offer gimmicks and half-truths? Will we be a pillar and buttress of the truth, counseling, praying, exhorting, pointing people to the truth of a living God who embraced death to give us life? May we be the household *of God!*