

## Summary

The Church was founded by Jesus, with the disciples illustrating its early form. The Holy Spirit is essential for God's work, both individually and corporately. Belonging to and actively participating in a local church is crucial for Christian growth and community.

## Background

The church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. (Acts 9:31)

## Hymn: Servant King *by H Auber*

1. Our blest Redeemer, ere he breathed his tender, last farewell,  
a guide, a Comforter, bequeathed with us to dwell.
2. He came sweet influence to impart, a gracious, willing guest,  
while he can find one humble heart wherein to rest.
3. And his that gentle voice we hear, soft as the breath of even,  
that checks each fault, that calms each fear, and speaks of heaven.
4. And every virtue we possess, and every conquest won,  
and every thought of holiness, are his alone.
5. Spirit of purity and grace, our weakness pitying, see:  
O make our hearts thy dwelling-place, and worthier thee..

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## Prayer:

Gracious Father,

You are the Source of life eternal, the Giver of all good things, the Hope of all who trust you. Thank you for all that you have done for me in Christ Jesus my Lord, and your condescension through the Holy Spirit to meet with me, walk with me and be my friend.

May this time of thanksgiving, praise and worship be a blessing for both You and me as we commune together.

In Jesus' Name, Amen

## Scripture Readings:

- John 16:4b-15

“I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the

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world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

### Message: “The Holy Spirit and The Church”

#### **The birth of the Church**

The Church was founded by Jesus when the disciples were called. The significance of their calling is reinforced by it being referred to in all four gospels, even referring to their calling as “the beginning” (EG John 15:27). During those three and a half years the relationship between the disciples and Jesus is for us a picture of the church in action. The disciples were the called out ones, the cleansed (John 13:10), the good, the not so good and the everyday. Their effectiveness was dependent upon Jesus commissioning them (Luke 10). They were instructed by him and led by him. They received the Holy Spirit from him. They called Jesus ‘Lord’ and ‘Master’ which Jesus acknowledged. This small church was then empowered by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

#### **The Local and Universal Church**

NT references to the church includes the church universal from its inception to its consummation, but generally where you see the word church you can legitimately replace it with the local church, your local church. In the estimation of our Lord, a small church walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit has far more significance than a large church relying on slick music, clever preaching and a 24/7 program of activities. The second and third chapters of Revelation make that clear.

#### **The Holy Spirit and The Church**

The only way God connects with his people is through the Holy Spirit. When Jesus said to Peter that the Father was the one who revealed his true identity to Peter, it had to be through the person of the Holy Spirit. When we say that Jesus comes to us, it is the Holy Spirit making real to us the character of Jesus Christ. When God convicts a person of sin, righteousness and judgment, it is through the work of the Holy Spirit. When we sense the presence of Jesus, it is the Holy Spirit making that presence real. When God works in and through his church it is always through the operation of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing that God does except through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Even creation, which we are told was brought into being by the Eternal Son, had the “Spirit of God hovering over the waters.” The Holy Spirit is the connection between God in heaven and us here on earth.

While we distinguish between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I would suggest that at least from our perspective, the lines are sometimes quite blurred. The Trinity always works in perfect unity and harmony with each other, and in perfect love for each other. The

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Scriptures refer to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of your [heavenly] Father (Matt 10:20), Jesus never leaving us but it’s actually the Holy Spirit who is with us, etc.

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would not come unless He returned to the Father (John 16:7). One can speculate why that was the case, after all didn’t Jesus breathe on the disciples after the resurrection, saying “receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22)? But whatever happened when Jesus breathed on them, it’s fairly obvious that the Pentecost experience, ten days after He returned to the Father, was something else.

We know the Holy Spirit works in the life of the individual. But how does the Holy Spirit interact with the corporate life of a local church, your church? Is it only that we as individuals, having been impacted by the Holy Spirit, then come together and testify, with gratitude, to those separate experiences. That is certainly part of our church experience, but we must also allow that the Holy Spirit interacts with the church when gathered together, like now. That is, the Holy Spirit wants to impact not just individuals, but also His Church, by which I mean the local church, collectively, because the church is both His Body and His beloved Bride. We should expect the Holy Spirit to meet with his church, with us, and minister to us together as one Body. The Holy Spirit wants to interact with the local church as a unit, one congregation, not just with us individually. While that might seem reasonable and perhaps obvious, there is a solid Scriptural basis for thinking that, and to expect it. To mention just a few:

- Jesus is the shepherd of the Flock, not just individual sheep.
- The institution of the Lord’s Table was in the context of the church gathered.
- The coming of the Holy Spirit was when the church was gathered together.
- Decision were made that seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to “us” (IE many).
- The letters of Paul are often prefaced with “to the church of God”, and address matters directly related to the corporate body.
- Seven letters in Revelation are addressed “to the angel of the church”, each concluding with the exhortation to “hear what the Spirit says to the church”.
- God receives glory through the church (Eph 3:21)

These passages reinforce the importance of belonging to a local church. You sometimes hear the statement “You don’t have to go to church to be a Christian.” I am very uncomfortable with that statement for several reasons:

Firstly this statement implies that a Christian only “goes” to church. That is, to walk in the door on Sunday morning just in time for the Welcome and walk out just after the Benediction, mission accomplished! No, not at all. The Christian is required to be in fellowship, that is to be connected, with other Christians. It’s as much for the benefit of others as it is for the single Christian. It’s more than just attending church on Sunday. We need mutual support that extends to a practical demonstration of love towards each other, praying with others, praying for each other. We need the fellowship of others for mutual encouragement, to sustain the vibrancy of our corporate witness, for discipline and correction, and for our spiritual health.

Secondly the statement dilutes the importance of obeying God. The statement might as well be: “You don’t have to obey Christ to be a Christian!” “You don’t

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have to read the Bible?” “You don’t have to pray.” “You can keep all your money and still be a Christian.” “You can be a Christian and cheat on your tax return” “You can be a Christian and screw the Government, the NDIS, for every last benefit you can extract” “You can be a Christian and live your life like everybody else.” “Salvation doesn’t depend on your ‘doing’”. No, No and No! Jesus said if you love me, you will obey my commands. Where does it say you should be in church. Hebrews 10:25 makes it pretty clear, and I’ll quote JB Phillips: “Let us not hold aloof from our church meetings, as some do.” You cannot be a Christian and wilfully disobey Christ. This is a subject worthy of more time, but sufficient to say it is the Holy Spirit who writes the Law of Christ on our hearts, which means the Christian has an internal motivation to comply.

Could Paul be a Christian and not preach the gospel? “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:16).

Then thirdly, as already mentioned, there are things that the Holy Spirit will say and do *only* in the context of a local church. In church we will here the Holy Spirit speaking to our hearts and minds as we submit ourselves to the public reading of Scripture and the prophetic proclamation of God’s Word. And there is something significant about corporate worship in the local church, and that’s not based just on personal experience. The worship of God in a local church is a microcosm of what is going on in heaven, based on what John saw in his Revelation. We need to be a part of all this, and the isolated Christian misses out, and is the poorer for it.

Fourthly, the statement that “you can be a Christian without going to church” ignores the fact that the Scriptures refer to the church as the Bride of Christ, so staying away does nothing to enhance the beauty of that Bride. A Christian, by remaining detached from the local church, causes the Bride of Christ to be disfigured – it’s incomplete, part of the Bride is missing. In addition, Scripture tells us that God’s glory is going to be revealed in the church (Eph 3:20). Keeping away from the local church is to keep away from the ultimate and full revelation of His glory. And also, the church, we are told, is a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:22). A good and necessary place to be, surely!

So, should a Christian belong to a local church? Yes, absolutely yes. And more than just belong, but to be actively involved. My church in Adelaide belongs to a network of churches where there is continual encouragement to implement 1 Corinthians 14:26. “When you come together [not ‘when you go to church’!] each one has ...” This is the Holy Spirit working in the context of a local church and by extension, in the life of individuals. Each one of us has a responsibility to participate in the life of the local church, not to just warm the seat. Now, I understand that requires a review of how a church meeting actually works, but it’s definitely worth pursuing. How could your church facilitate the “each one has a ...”?

Our God, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, wants to interact with the local church collectively. He is not just Lord of the individual, but he is Lord of the church (Eph 5:23).

Paul tells us in his letter to the church at Ephesus “You are ... members of the household of God. ... In him you are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit... [so

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that] he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit. ... Now to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations.”

So may it be that in your local church you may together, as the church of the Living God, allow the Holy Spirit to continue to have His way among you.

Amen.

### Hymn: *by C Wesley*

1. O thou who camest from above the pure celestial fire to impart,  
kindle a flame of sacred love on the mean altar of my heart!
2. There let it for thy glory burn with inextinguishable blaze,  
and trembling to its source return in humble prayer and fervent praise.
3. Jesus, confirm my heart's desire to work, and speak, and think for thee;  
still let me guard the holy fire, and still stir up the gift in me.
4. Ready for all thy perfect will, my acts of faith and love repeat;  
till death thy endless mercies seal, and make the sacrifice complete..

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### Prayer for the suffering church (*Barnabas Prayer for 14 July 2024*)

Heavenly Father, we bring before You our Christian family in Saudi Arabia.

We ask You to sustain them in a land where they form a tiny minority in the birthplace of Islam. We give thanks that recent reforms have softened some of the country's harshest laws and pray that Your people will have greater freedom to exercise their faith. We ask You to build up our Saudi brothers and sisters, almost all converts from Islam and secret believers. We ask for Your Divine direction and discernment upon them so that they build confidently on the cornerstone of our faith, our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose mighty Name we pray. (Ephesians 2:20)

### Benediction

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen.

*This service was prepared by Warren Mack for HopeNet SA*