

Where Do We Go From Here?

We find ourselves in a crisis. Unless growth comes, this church will not exist in 20 years' time.

A crisis is a place in time when changes must take place to survive.

Is the path of a cell group church the new journey for this church?

In the Old Testament the Tabernacle and the Temple were both referred to as the House of God, or the Temple of Yahweh.

1 Chronicles 6:48 [NIV] *“Their fellow Levites were assigned to all the other duties of the tabernacle, the house of God.”*

1 Chronicles 25:6 [NIV] *“All these men were under the supervision of their fathers for the music of the temple of the LORD, with cymbals, lyres and harps, for the ministry at the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the supervision of the king.”*

Ezra 5:2, 15 [NIV] *“Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them.” ... “and he told him, ‘Take these articles and go and deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem. And rebuild the house of God on its site.’”*

In the New Testament the concept of the “House of God” radically changes.

1 Peter 2:5 [NIV] *“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.”*

Peter sees believers as “living stones” that are being built into a “spiritual house.”

Therefore the “House of God” is no longer seen as an edifice made by joining physical stones but by joining human lives.

Who will be the builder of this new spiritual House of God?

Matthew 16:18 [NIV] *“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”*

The construction work was **not** to be done by skilled specialists as was the case of the Old Testament Tabernacle and Temple.

The only builder was going to be Jesus Christ Himself.

The “living stones” Jesus Christ would select for the **walls and pillars** of this spiritual edifice would be the “ecclesia” the called-out ones also translated “church.”

Notice what events led up to this original statement of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Matthew 16:13-18 [NIV] *“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ ‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on **this rock** I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”*

What was the “rock” on which the church was to be founded?

Peter?

No!

It is founded on what had been revealed to Peter.

The fact that Jesus was the Christ [the waited-for Messiah] and the only Son of God.

Christ is the only foundational rock the New Testament church has.

1 Corinthians 10:1-4 [NIV] *“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and **that rock was Christ.**”*

The Old Testament reveals who this rock would be.

The “rock” accompanied them at that time.

John 14:15-18 [NIV] *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. **I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.**”*

Christ promises to “accompany” the New Testament church, continuing what He started in the Old Covenant church.

The foundation of the church is Christ but the walls and pillars are formed by “living stones.”

1 Corinthians 3:11 [NIV] *“For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”*

Christ is the foundation of His church.

1 Corinthians 3:9 [NIV] *“For we are God’s fellow-workers; **you are God’s field, God’s building.**”*

We are God’s building, we are **not** the foundation; that can only be Christ. But we are the “living stones” that form the walls and pillars.

This theme of our being the building that is Christ’s church is continued throughout the teachings in the New Testament.

Acts 20:32 [NIV] *“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”*

Paul tells us it is God and the Word who build us up.

Ephesians 2:21 [NIV] *“In him the whole building is joined together and rises to **become a holy temple in the Lord.**”*

It is “in Christ” that we are being built up, joined together to form the building in which the Holy Spirit will live and work.

Hebrews 3:6 [NIV] *“But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. **And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.**”*

Jesus Christ is the faithful Son of God who oversees the “*House* [family] “*of God.*”

The Greek word translated “*house*” [ōikōs] means dwelling, home and by implication the family that inhabits that dwelling.

We are built into the “*walls*” and “*pillars*” of this living construction as we work harnessed to Jesus Christ.

Matthew 11:29-30 [NIV] “*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*”

This yoke that Christ is offering joins us to Him as the lead “*animal*” in the work we do together.

We do more than just work with Christ ourselves.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 [NIV] “*Therefore encourage one another and **build each other up**, just as in fact you are doing.*”

We build each other up into the edifice that Christ is constructing, **encourage others to be “yoked” with us and Christ in the work.**

Ephesians 4:11-13 [NIV] “*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, **so that the body of Christ may be built up** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ.*”

To help each and every “*living stone*” to be best possible part of the final building. Christ has given all the church “*bond slaves*” to help them fashion the temple to the perfect shape, their “*living stone*” to fit tightly in the final position in the completed building that will be to the glory of God.

It is obvious that Jesus intended to be the builder of the Church, but just as obvious that the “*living stones*” were to be empowered by Him to share in the building up, or edifying, of all nearby “*stones.*”

Consider such a lifestyle of such a church. A tight-knit relationship existing between every “*living stone.*”

United by the cement of love the “*stones*” will experience the life of Christ flowing through them, empowering them and continually building up one another.

The Church is also a body with Christ as the Head.

1 Corinthians 12:14-19 [NIV] “*Now **the body is not made up of one part but of many.** If the foot should say, “*Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,*” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 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 cease to be part of the body. 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? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be?”*

This body never says of another member “*I have no use of you.*”

For a physical body to work effectively it has to be united intimately all the time.

The parts of the body are diverse in nature but have to be one in mind and feeling even as a physical body.

Ephesians 4:14-16 [NIV] “*Then we will no longer be infants, 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. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. **From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.***

The focus of our lifestyle is to be responsible for building up one another.

Galatians 6:1 [NIV] *“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”*

The Greek word translated “restore” is “katartizō” is translated “mend” when referring to what James and John were doing to their nets when Christ called them to become His disciples [**Mark 1:19**].

Christ wants to use us to “mend” damaged lives.

Hidden among the instructions given by Paul about the limiting of the gift of tongues are simple instructions for a meeting of the church.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 [NIV] *“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not **love**, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not **love**, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not **love**, I gain nothing. **Love** is patient, **love** is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. **Love** does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. **Love** never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and **love**. But the greatest of these is **love**.”*

Love has to be the basis of any meeting of “living stones” for it is love that binds us together.

1 Corinthians 14:26-33 [Message Bible] *“So here’s what I want you to do. When you gather for worship, **each one of you be prepared with something that will be useful for all**. Sing a hymn, teach a lesson, tell a story, lead a prayer, provide an insight. If prayers are offered in tongues, two or three’s the limit, and then only if someone is present who can interpret what you’re saying. Otherwise, keep it between God and yourself. And no more than two or three speakers at a meeting, with the rest of you listening and taking it to heart. Take your turn, no one person taking over. Then **each speaker gets a chance to say something special from God, and you all learn from each other**. If you choose to speak, you’re also responsible for how and when you speak. When we worship the right way, God doesn’t stir us up into confusion; he brings us into harmony. This goes for all the churches, no exceptions.”*

All “living stones” are to equally participate in this meeting.

Exercising their personal spiritual gifts to edify [build up] each other.

This describes the meetings of the early church.

Recognising there **cannot** be such total participation by every member when the gathering are only made up of large, often impersonal, groups.

The people of God moved from house to house in small groups.

By moving their residences, they became intimately acquainted with each person’s surroundings.

Archaeological excavations in Jerusalem show that only a very few rich people had “*upper rooms*”, so the groups meeting were limited to the maximum of twelve people.

It is significant that in Jesus’ ministry He operated out of homes, not formal buildings.

He often taught His disciples in houses.

What we are considering is giving them “*body life evangelism.*”

This is the simple witness of the life of Jesus, observed by others as it flows through the “*living stones*” that express His love to others in their own community.

This can cause the most hardened sceptics to confess Christ as their Lord.

In the early church there were no specialists. Apart from the teaching of the apostles, leadership was **not** emphasised to any great detail.

The work of loving help and witness was handled by those who were closest on hand as the need and opportunity arose in their own community.

God knows there are two main factors in spiritual growth:

- a) Receiving God’s love power by the active presence of the Holy Spirit in us.
- b) Our becoming a channel of that love power, God’s love, the most powerful force in the whole universe.

The greatest men and women among these house churches were those who served, not those who led.

Each house church had a “*father,*” one who could be respected and followed, but **only** by example for others in the group to mature themselves.

The domination of one person over others in the group limits the possibility for growth.

We have an example of a house church petty dictator being rebuked by the apostle John.

3 John 5-11 [Message Bible] “*Earlier I wrote something along this line to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves being in charge, denigrates my counsel. If I come, you can be sure I’ll hold him to account for spreading vicious rumours about us. As if that weren’t bad enough, he not only refuses hospitality to travelling Christians but tries to stop others from welcoming them. Worse yet, instead of inviting them in he throws them out.*”

Each house church is to be a centre of hospitality that will allow all members to feel free to invite their neighbours and friends to join.

These house churches were **not** independent from one another, they networked together from the first hour of their existence.

A city or area wide federation shows that “*house churches*” combined to form a “*local church*” and met as larger groups at times.

1 Corinthians 1:2 [NIV] “*To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:*”

A combined title of all the house churches in Corinth.

2 Corinthians 1:1 [NIV] *“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia:”*

Shows that a general relationship existed between all believers in extended areas.

1 Corinthians 11 Here is described a citywide gathering of house groups that ended in a scandal of lovelessness.

Acts 20 Describes a large gathering of house churches to hear the apostle Paul teach as he visited their area.

Non-Christians are attracted to people rather than steeples.

The cell group house church could be the way the Holy Spirit is leading us as a group of *“living stones.”*