

CHRISTIAN CONSUMER OR BIBLICAL DISCIPLE?

*Examining the difference between
cultural Christianity and biblical discipleship*

13. Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"
14. And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."
15. He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"
16. Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
17. Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.
18. "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Matthew 16:13-18



"I will build My ekklesia"

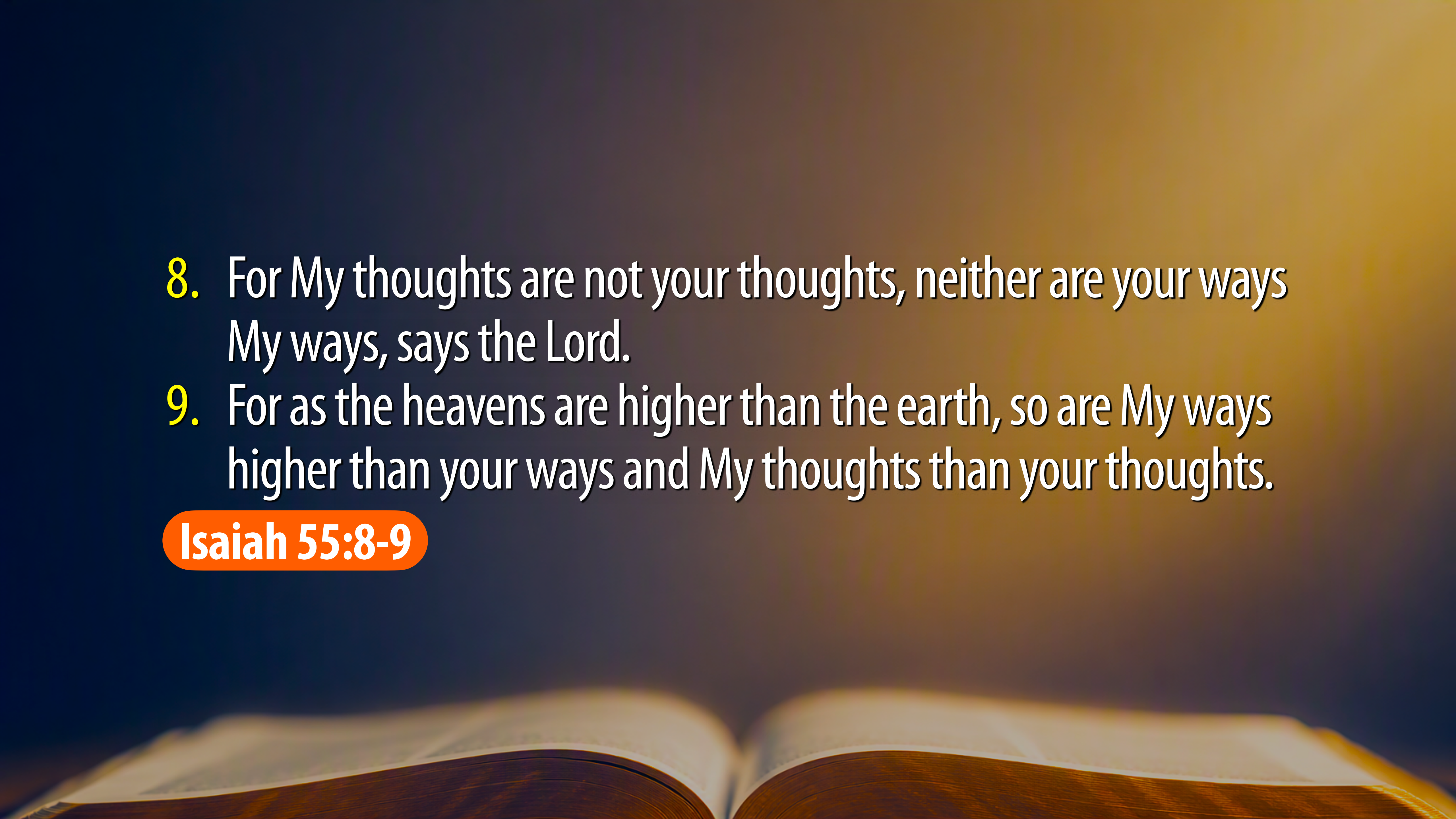
- ▶ **My** gathered people
- ▶ **My** set apart people
- ▶ A people **belonging to Christ**
- ▶ A people **set apart for Him**

The Church is:

- ▶ **His** people
- ▶ **His** assembly
- ▶ **His** possession
- ▶ **His** building project

And I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock
I will build My church, and the gates of
Hades shall not overpower it [or be strong to
its detriment or hold out against it].

Matthew 16:18 (Amplified Bible)

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8. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord.
 9. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:8-9

We cannot begin in error and expect to finish in truth!

- ▶ Our convictions and our beliefs ultimately determine how we live.
- ▶ Because these core convictions act as the starting premises of our lives, **any error at the root guarantees a distorted fruit.**

PILLARS OF TRUTH

Jesus said
that **HE**
would build
HIS Church.

Christ's victories over His
8 And the remnant of

But you shall receive power (ability, efficiency,
and might) when the Holy Spirit has come
upon you, and you shall be My witnesses . . .

Acts 1:8 (Amplified Bible)

PILLARS OF TRUTH

Jesus said
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What we
believe about
the Church
determines
how we view
the Church &
how we relate
to the Church.

Special interest groups are groups of people who come together because they share a particular interest, hobby, profession, cause, identity, or area of expertise.

That common interest or purpose is the catalyst for members to connect, learn, share experiences and sometimes work together towards shared goals.

MY ASSOCIATION WITH AN INTEREST GROUP

- ① My relationship with an interest group is essentially voluntary.
- ① I join because I have an interest in what the group does & how that group fits my perceived needs in fulfilling that interest.
I participate to the degree that it serves that interest.
- ① I may enjoy the people, but my fundamental relationship is with the group and its activities.
- ① If I cease to find the group useful, enjoyable or compatible with my preferences, I can leave & find a new group.



- ▶ What if, as believers today, we have come to relate to the Church in much the same way that we relate to the special interest groups - the other groups - we associate with?





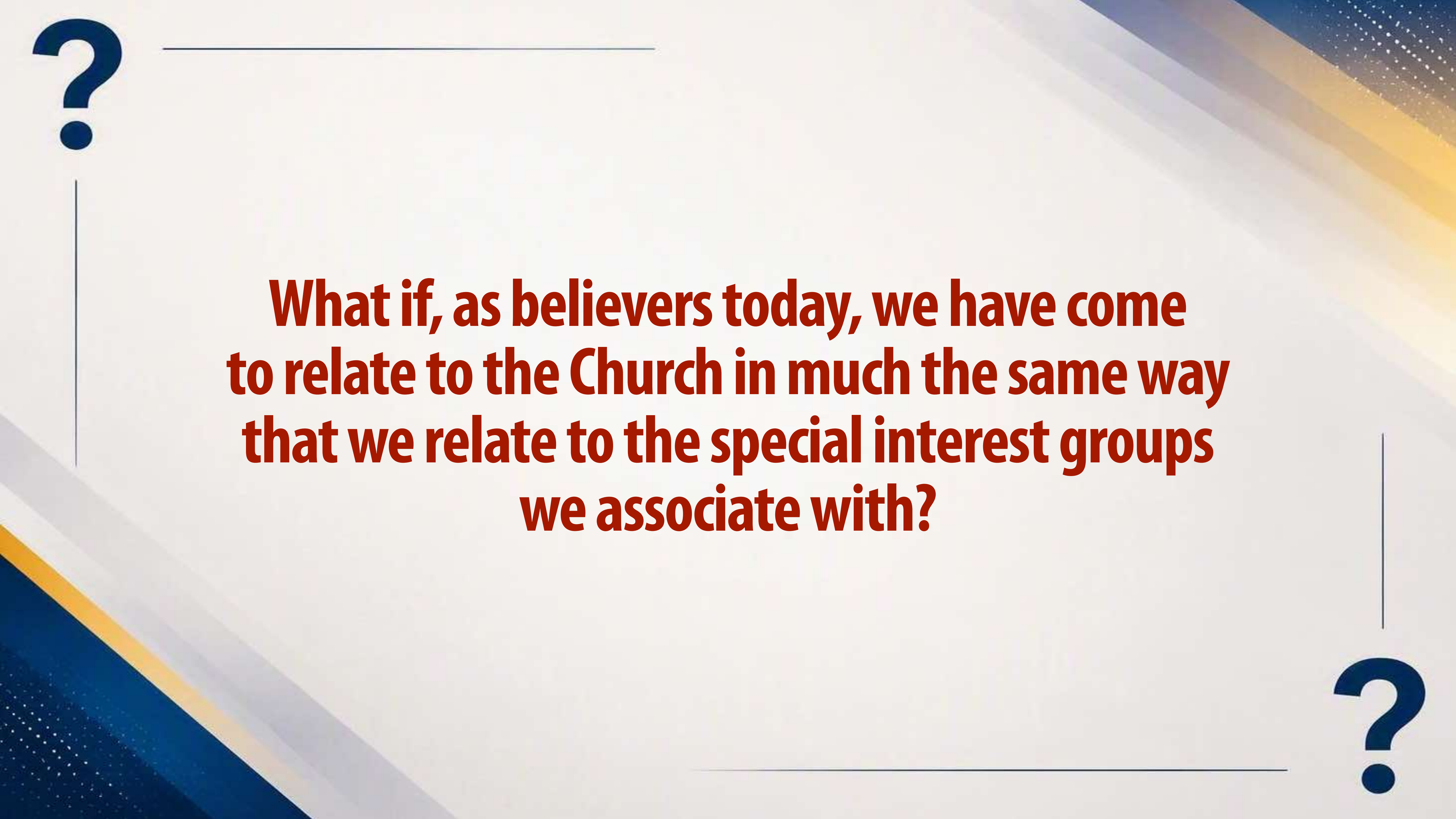
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- ▶ What if, as believers today, we have come to relate to the Church in much the same way that we relate to the special interest groups – the other groups – we associate with?
- ▶ What are the consequences of relating to the Church that way?
- ▶ What is the outcome when the Church today presents itself as just another group for people to associate with?





**What if, as believers today, we have come
to relate to the Church in much the same way
that we relate to the special interest groups
we associate with?**

How do we normally relate to a special-interest group?

- ① We find a group that interests us.
- ② We choose to associate with that group because it has something in common with us.
- ③ We decide to join that group.
- ④ We decide the degree to which we want to participate.
- ⑤ We decide how committed we want to be.
- ⑥ We decide how often we will attend & if & when we will attend.

How do we normally relate to a special-interest group?

- ▶ We decide which activities we will participate in.
- ▶ We decide how much time we are prepared to give.
- ▶ And if, for whatever reason, we find that the group isn't meeting our expectations, or our interests change, or something else becomes more important to us, we can reduce our involvement, or we can simply leave.



What are the consequences of relating to the Church that way?



When I relate to the Church as just a special-interest group . . .

- ▶ **I choose** whether I associate with the Church.
- ▶ **I decide** how committed I want to be.
- ▶ **I determine** how often I attend & when I attend.
- ▶ **I determine** how much I participate & how involved I become.
- ▶ **I choose** what programmes & activities suit me.
- ▶ **I decide** what I will give: my time, my energy, my resources, my gifts.
- ▶ **I retain** the right to leave if the Church no longer meets my expectations or if I find somewhere else I prefer. I simply move on.

On that basis the Church becomes . . .

- ▶ something I have chosen.
- ▶ something I participate in.
- ▶ something I receive from.
- ▶ something that needs to fit my life.
- ▶ something that needs to meet my expectations.
- ▶ something I can leave when it no longer does.

CHURCH ATTENDEES

THE CONSUMERS

What am **I** getting?

Does this meet **my** needs
& **my** expectations?

Do **I** like what **I'm** receiving?

Is there somewhere else that
might suit **me** better?

THE CHURCH

THE PROVIDER

Just there for our wants & needs?



THE PRODUCT

- Preaching • Worship • Programmes
- Children's Ministry • Youth Ministry
- Creche • Small Groups • Facilities

THE WHOLE SUNDAY EXPERIENCE



Is the **PRODUCT** this Church
is offering meeting
MY expectations?

I'm simply a **CONSUMER** of what a
Church offers, deciding what is for me,
what isn't, how I want to relate to others,
how I want to participate, if & when I
attend, how I give of time & talents . . .



If the Church is just another interest group offering a product or service that I buy into in whatever way suits me, to whatever level suits me:

What happens to **commitment**?

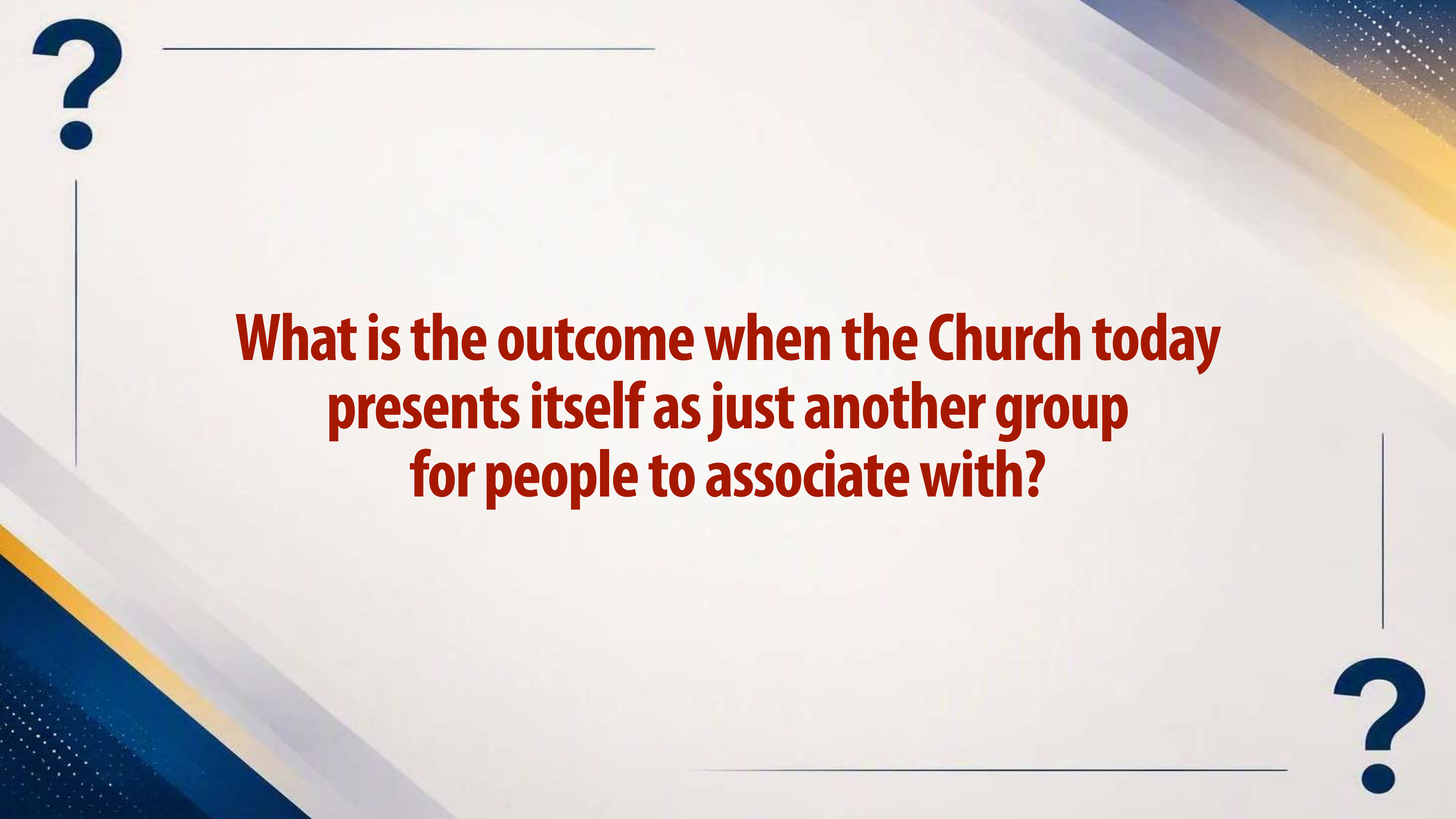
What happens to **responsibility**?

What happens to **accountability**?

What happens to **relationship**?

What happens to my understanding of the people sitting around me?
Are they **people God has joined me** to or are they simply people who happen to attend the same group that I attend?





**What is the outcome when the Church today
presents itself as just another group
for people to associate with?**

CHURCH

The expressed responsibility of the **Customer Service Officers** was to make sure that those attending on a Sunday were looked after, and that the **PRODUCT** the Church was providing was meeting the expectations of its **CUSTOMERS**.

- ① If people are **customers**:
the church becomes a **provider**.
- ② If Sunday is the **product**:
the service becomes a **consumer experience**.
- ③ If expectations determine whether the product is successful:
the consumer ultimately becomes the arbiter of what the church should provide & how it should be provided.

**That is almost the exact inversion,
the polar opposite, of the Biblical picture.**

With those expectations & convictions, the Church naturally begins to ask:

- ④ What do people want?
- ④ What are their expectations?
- ④ What will attract them?
- ④ What will keep them coming?
- ④ What do we need to do to give them a good experience?

- ▶ Instead of asking: What does Jesus require of us in partnering with the Holy Spirit to see Jesus build HIS Church?
... the questions become: **What do people want?**
- ▶ Instead of asking: What is God requiring of us?
... we begin asking: **What will people respond to?**
- ▶ Instead of asking: How can we help people become committed followers of Jesus?
... we can end up asking: **How can we ensure that people will attend & what do we need to do so that people to come back next Sunday?**

Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Church model asked:
How can **WE** organise the Church around biblical purposes?

Bill Hybels' Seeker-Sensitive Church model asked:
How can **WE** organise the Church so that unchurched people will come?



- ▶ Because Jesus said “I will build My Church,” the issue then is NOT how can we organise the Church? The question should be ... **What is Jesus building?**
- ▶ If God's will must be outworked God's way and for His glory, perhaps the question shouldn't simply be: What works? but: ... **What is God's way?**
- ▶ If success in the Kingdom of God is spelt O.B.E.D.I.E.N.C.E., perhaps our primary responsibility isn't to produce the results we believe God wants, but rather our responsibility is: ... **to hear God, to obey God & to leave the results in God's hands!**

Because we live in the Age of the Spirit & because Jesus Christ is Lord OVER His Church & the Holy Spirit is Lord IN His Church, shouldn't we also be asking ...

- ▶ Holy Spirit, what are You saying to the Church?
- ▶ Holy Spirit, how do You want the Church to function?
- ▶ Holy Spirit, how do You want us to reach the lost?
- ▶ Holy Spirit, how are you wanting to equip & mature the saints?
- ▶ Holy Spirit, what are You wanting to do among us?



embrace the
emergent church

Is the issue a cultural issue or a biblical issue?
Do we respond culturally/humanistically or biblically?

Cultural/humanistic response:

How must we change the Church and Christian discipleship so that they fit the culture of today?

Biblical response:

How would the Holy Spirit have us communicate and embody the unchanging Gospel faithfully within a changing culture today?

“
The answer to a culture that doesn't know God is NOT to make the Church more like the culture. **It is to make the true and living God known.**

We don't need to make God relevant. God is infinitely relevant. **We need to reveal Him as He has revealed Himself** — in all His majesty, holiness, glory, goodness, mercy, righteousness, sovereignty and love.

When the Church makes much of God, rather than making much of itself, people are confronted with something this world cannot manufacture — **the reality and majesty of the living God.**”

But as it is, God has placed and arranged the limbs and organs in the body, each [particular one] of them, just as He wished and saw fit and with the best adaptation.

1 Corinthians 12:18 (Amplified Bible)

... so we, who are many, are one body in Christ,
and individually members one of another.

Romans 12:5

The relationship isn't merely between me and an organisation.
It is between me and those God has placed me with in the Body.





The biblical Church isn't a congregation of consumers gathered around a religious product. It is a family into which we are brought and a Body into which we are joined.

Therefore:

Church isn't primarily something we attend. It is something to which we belong.

That belonging inevitably brings:

- relationship • responsibility • accountability
- mutual dependence • mutual ministry.



The Church is not merely a meeting I attend.
It is family to which I belong.
It is a Body of which I am a member.
It is a people among whom I have responsibilities.

Therefore:

My absence affects others.
My contribution matters.
My sin can affect others.
My obedience can bless others.
My gifts are needed by others.
Their gifts are needed by me.



The Church IS NOT an organisation designed to deliver a religious experience that I can choose to partake in, which is subject to my needs & wants & convictions.

Rather the Church IS a living organism under the government of Christ that I am an essential INTER-DEPENDENT member in & that I am committed & submitted to.



The church is no longer primarily asking:
How do we co-operate with the Holy Spirit to
see these people formed into mature disciples
of Jesus who love God and one another?

Instead, the church is asking:
How do we provide an experience that people
will value & will seek after?

The primary ministry model today is:

clergy → ministry → congregation

Jesus + me + the church I choose to attend

The Biblical model is:

Christ → the Holy Spirit → the whole Body → mutual ministry

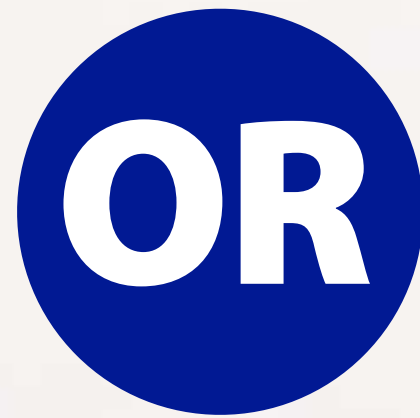
Christ + the Holy Spirit + His people + me as a member of His Body



- ④ The **Christian consumer** asks: "Which church is right for me?"
The **biblical disciple** asks: "Lord, where have You placed me?"
- ④ The **Christian consumer** asks: "What does this church offer me?"
The **biblical disciple** asks: "What has God given me to offer the Body?"
- ④ The **Christian consumer** asks: "Does this church meet my expectations?"
The **biblical disciple** asks: "Am I meeting God's expectations of me?"
- ④ The **Christian consumer** asks: "Do I like what is happening?"
The **biblical disciple** asks: "What is the Holy Spirit saying?" "What is truth?"
- ④ And the **biblical disciple's** ultimate question is: "**Am I obeying?**"



Am I a disciple of Jesus Christ, joined to the Body of Christ as a committed, submitted, contributing, functioning, accountable, relational member?



Am I a consumer relating to the Church in the same way I relate to my special interest group?

How we view the Church will determine whether we are a DISCIPLE or a CONSUMER.