Where can we find authentic and authoritative instruction on what the church should be? Who can tell us what a church should be like? In His Word, God has provided us with His blueprint for His church. In 1 Peter 2:5, He reveals unto us that the church is designed to be a spiritual house which offers up spiritual sacrifices unto Him. “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”

THE CHURCH IS BUILT BY THE LORD

Firstly, we note in our text that it is said concerning the church – “Ye . . . are built up a spiritual house”. Who is the builder of the church? The Lord Jesus declared, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). What an emphatic declaration! The Lord says that He will build His own church. He builds it according to His blueprint for His own glorious purposes.

Our Lord is a great builder. Hebrews 3:4 tells us, “For every house is builded by some man; but he that buildt all things is God.” He is the great Creator of all things. “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). This great builder of heaven and earth is also the builder of the church.

God has laid the foundation of the church, and it is identified as “the apostles and prophets” (i.e. the Scriptures which they have written); and the corner stone of that foundation is Christ Himself (Ephesians 2:20). It is upon Christ and His Word that the church is to be built. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:11, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

God has also chosen the building material, the “lively stones”, which are the believers. The apostle Peter reminded the believers, “Ye also, as lively stones” (1 Peter 2:5a). Believers are “lively stones” because they are united by faith to “a living stone” (1 Peter 2:4), even Jesus Christ. We are living stones only because we are being built upon the “living stone”, which is also the chief corner stone of the foundation. No believer is a living stone as Christ is. Without being spiritually united to Christ, who is the corner stone of the foundation of the church and also the living stone, no one can be part of the spiritual house that is being built unto God. If we are not built
Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:5
upon Him, or if we do not believe on Him as the Scriptures speak of Him, we cannot be living stones.

No man should ever assume that he is the builder of the church. Man is neither the architect nor the developer of the church. We are only His labourers. In 1 Corinthians 3:9, we are reminded, “For we are labourers together with God.” Now, if we are truly labourers with God, we must know and comply with His plan for the church. Otherwise, we are just hecklers in His church. We cannot build the church in any way we want.

THE CHURCH IS THE LORD’S HOUSE

The Lord builds His church for Himself. The Lord Jesus said that it is “my church” (Matthew 16:18). The church is the Lord’s building, a place of His dwelling. Hence, as Peter said, the church is a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). The church is not a place for human pleasure or carnal entertainment. It is a gathering of God’s people to glorify Him and to do His will. It is a spiritual house unto God’s glory. In the church, no other business is to be conducted except seeking His will and doing His pleasure.

Several designations for the church in the New Testament point to the church as the Lord’s house. It is referred to as “the church of God” eight times (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13; 1 Timothy 3:5). Three times the church is referred to as “the house of God” (1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 10:21; 1 Peter 4:17), one time as “the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19) and also once as “an habitation of God” (Ephesians 2:22).

So the church is also called a “household of faith” (Galatians 6:10) because the Lord dwells with those who have placed genuine faith in Him. He is the head of this household, the church (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 5:23b). Genuine believers submit to His headship joyfully and willingly. In the church, everyone must acknowledge Christ as the Master of the house. In the church, we are in His dwelling place; we are in His palace, even in the presence of His throne.

In Ephesians 2:22, everyone in the church is reminded: “In whom (Christ) ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” The believers are built together through the Spirit as God’s dwelling place. In other words, every member of the church constitutes a part of His house, and together they are His habitation. Just as He dwelt in the temple, now He dwells in the church – in the hearts of His people and among them. Christ puts His Spirit in everyone who is His, that they may function as an habitation of God.

The idea of “the household of God” is linked to another title of the church in Ephesians, namely “an holy temple in the Lord”. The apostle Paul wrote, “In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord” (Ephesians 2:21). The words “holy temple” here allude to the temple which was at Jerusalem. Whether it was the first
temple which Solomon built, or the second
temple (which continued to the times of
the apostles) built by the returnees from
Babylon, it was of great magnificence and
beauty. But more importantly, it was built
to be a place of holy worship. Likewise,
the church is built as a spiritual temple,
having believers fitly framed together
in Christ, to render holy worship and
service unto God.

So Paul warned the disobedient and
carnal men in the Corinthian church,
“If any man defile the temple of God,
im shall God destroy; for the temple
of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1
Corinthians 3:17). Again, Paul reminded
the Corinthians in his second epistle
to them that spiritual and moral purity
is required of them in the church, for
they are the temple of God. “And what
agreement hath the temple of God with
idols? for ye are the temple of the living
God; as God hath said, I will dwell in
them, and walk in them; and I will be
their God, and they shall be my people”
(2 Corinthians 6:16). The church members
must be separated from idolatry and all
forms of worldliness as the Lord dwells
in them, and walks in them. Since we are
God’s spiritual house, nothing impure
or unholy should even be once named
among us (Ephesians 5:3-5).

THE CHURCH’S FUNCTION AS
A SPIRITUAL HOUSE UNTO GOD

1 Peter 2:5 – “Ye also, as lively
stones, are built up a spiritual
house, an holy priesthood, to offer up
spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God
by Jesus Christ.”

When Peter described the church as
a “spiritual house”, two ideas about the
church are presented together. Firstly,
the church is depicted as an edifice or
a building, and secondly, as a spiritual
household, like the family of a priest.

A spiritual edifice consecrated to the Lord

The first concept in the designation
“spiritual house” is that the church is like
a spiritual edifice similar to the temple
building. The church is a spiritual edifice;
and the believers are the lively stones that
make up that spiritual edifice. The saints
in their corporate capacity are a holy
temple unto the Lord.

At this juncture, it is necessary and useful
to recollect the Lord’s words concerning
the temples of the Old Testament. He said
to David who desired to build a temple
unto the Lord – “Whereas I have not dwelt
in any house since the time that I brought
up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even
to this day, but have walked in a tent and
in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I
have walked with all the children of Israel
spake I a word with any of the tribes of
Israel, whom I commanded to feed my
people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me
an house of cedar?” (2 Samuel 7:6-7). The
Lord never asked anyone to build a palace
for Him. He was not earnestly seeking for
a majestic edifice.

When David’s son, Solomon, built
the house for the Lord, God was not
delighted by its beauty or glamour. The
Lord declared through His servant Isaiah,
“Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my
throne, and the earth is my footstool:
where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isaiah 66:1-2). The Lord was more concerned about the heart of the worshippers rather than the physical charm of the building. In the early church days, when Stephen addressed the Jews, he said, “But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Acts 7:47-48) and he went on to quote the above passage from Isaiah the prophet (Acts 7:49-50).

When Jesus was at the temple area with His disciples, they wanted to show Him the buildings of the temple (Matthew 24:1) which Herod had renovated. It was an architectural masterpiece – a majestic building made of stones. One of them said, “Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!” (Mark 13:1). But the Lord did not seem to have any admiration for that architectural feat at all, for He said, “There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:2; Mark 13:2).

If those buildings were of the greatest concern to God, He would have preserved them to this day. He destroyed them by the hands of the heathen kings and their generals when the worshippers did not keep the sanctity of worship offered within those edifices.

God’s greatest concern is that His people will be a spiritual house of pure worship and faithful service. The church must strive to be a spiritual edifice and not be occupied with gorgeous architecture of buildings made with hands. The church is not about physical structures but spiritual realities. The church is not about the externals but the inner devotion of the congregation to the Lord.

A spiritual house of spiritual sacrifices

The second concept inherent in the depiction of the church as a “spiritual house” is that it is a spiritual household, “an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”. Here, the apostle Peter makes a quick transition from his
description of a spiritual building to that of spiritual service. The church is not just a formal gathering of Christians, but also a collective service of His people rendered to the glory of God.

The whole church is a priesthood; and every believer, a priest. As priests, we are to offer “spiritual sacrifices”, not “animal sacrifices”. Christ the High Priest had already offered the eternal atoning sacrifice on our behalf, so there is no need for blood sacrifices in churches today. We have no more atoning sacrifice to offer for our forgiveness because Christ had offered Himself as our perfect sacrifice. We read in Hebrews 9:14 – “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

The moment we trust in Christ, we are called into the spiritual service of the Almighty. A brief description of various spiritual sacrifices that believers should offer to the Lord is mentioned below.

The first spiritual sacrifice all genuine believers in the church are instructed to offer is the consecration of their bodies to live unto God. Romans 12:1 says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

The second spiritual sacrifice that believers should render is to praise God continually. Hebrews 13:15 instructs us, “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”

The third spiritual sacrifice that is mentioned in the Scriptures is to do good and to provide help to those who are in need. Hebrews 13:16 exhorts us, “But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

The fourth spiritual sacrifice that is mentioned in the Bible is to win souls for Christ that they may glorify Him in worship. Paul said in Romans 15:16, “That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.”

The fifth spiritual sacrifice that we read in the Bible is the generous help to the Lord’s servants and their work for the Lord. Philippians 4:18 says, “But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.” The generosity of the church in Philippi towards the apostle Paul was an offering up of a spiritual sacrifice that was wellpleasing to God.

None of these five duties belong to an elite group of believers alone. They are every believer’s responsibilities in God’s household. No one who belongs to His spiritual house should ignore or neglect these spiritual sacrifices. As a holy priesthood, we must be diligent and faithful in our service to God. When all the believers stay together in faith as lively stones and serve together as a priesthood, the church will not only appear, but also function like a household of God.