

## The Church VS. the Churches: Is Membership in a Local Church Required?

### INTRODUCTION:

1. Several years ago, I began a series of lessons comparing the various churches that we have today to the **true church** of the Bible and called it by this title. I did not do it justice, so I want to return to it.
  - A. I began this series and return to it because we need to see that the truth sanctifies, or sets apart, those who follow Christ from all others (Jn. 17:15-19 – “I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. <sup>17</sup> **Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.** <sup>18</sup> As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be **sanctified in truth.**”).
  - B. That separation the truth brings needs to be understood and appreciated if we are ever going to be as effective as we should in our evangelistic efforts.
    - i. For, we need to see the gospel as not just being for the unchurched, but also for those who may be sitting in the pews but **who do not serve God in truth.**
    - ii. For, it is important to know that there are often significant differences in what the **truth teaches** and what mainline, “acceptable,” **churches** of today **teach.**
    - iii. Now, I am not trying to be mean, but we need to know that just because a church exists, is accepted, and is even well thought of does not mean that it teaches the truth or exists on Christ’s terms. For, Christ does have terms of local church existence (read Rev. 2-3).
  - C. So, because the truth revealed in the Bible tells us what we should believe and practice, we are required not only to know, believe, and practice it, but to help those who may be in error to know, believe, and practice that truth that they might serve God acceptably and be saved.
2. Among all the churches today that claim to follow Christ, one of the foundational areas where these churches conflict with the truth, and therefore with the true church, is the question of **whether membership in a local church is necessary to be a faithful Christian, to serve God acceptably.**
  - A. The reason for this discrepancy can be attributed to fact that “extremism often begets extremism.”
    - i. When those of the “Protestant Reformation Movement” *protested* and sought to *reform* certain doctrines of the Catholic church, they swung to the opposite extremes, rather than finding the truth, which is generally somewhere in the middle.
    - ii. One of the Catholic doctrines this movement protested was that membership in a local Catholic Church was necessary for salvation, to go to heaven.
      - a. They were right in rejecting this Catholic doctrine because it teaches this based on the false concept that the local Catholic church is the **dispenser of God’s grace** and salvation **through its priests and the sacraments.**
      - b. In other words, Catholicism says you must go to a Catholic church to get divine grace, because they say it is dispensed to you **through** the priests who gives you the sacraments, or the bread and fruit of the vine, which is claimed to be actual body and blood of Jesus.
    - iii. Protestant churches reacted to this false doctrine by establishing extreme doctrines of their own!
      - a. The result was their **rejection of the importance of the local church** in connection with one’s **faithful service** to God and **salvation.**
      - b. So, for protestant churches, which include most all mainline denominations, it is taught that the local church **plays no necessary role** in our service to God and salvation.
      - c. In other words, most denominations teach that **being a faithful member of a local church** is important, but not necessary for faithful service or salvation in any way. For, they claim, you can serve acceptably worshipping at home, the woods, etc.!
  - B. Of course, what should concern us is not what Catholicism teaches or what mainline denominational churches teach, but rather what the Scriptures teach about this matter.
    - i. For, examining subjects like this is important because the Scriptures address this subject and we need be convinced of the truth before we can teach others.

- ii. And, it is important because the **truth** on this matter has really been challenged, even among brethren, due to the COVID epidemic which revealed some real weaknesses concerning the importance of assembling as a local church and its role in our lives as Christians.
- C. So, that is what I want us to consider today. Is membership in a local church necessary for faithful service to God?

## BODY:

### I. The Gospel, Disciples, and the local church:

- A. The gospel is to be preached to the world to make people **disciples**, or **followers**, of Jesus.
  - 1. We see this in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20 – “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”).
    - a. Becoming a disciple begins with following the teaching of Christ by being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit (28:19).
    - b. It also required **obeying** the things commanded by the Lord, who has all authority in heaven and on earth (28:20, 18).
    - c. Though most churches reject to some degree even these points, that is for another lesson.
  - 2. These instructions were followed when the gospel was preached at Pentecost (Acts 2:36-38, 40-42, 47 – “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that **God has made Him both Lord and Christ**—this Jesus whom you crucified.” <sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” <sup>38</sup> Peter said to them, “**Repent**, and each of you **be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ** for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit... <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” <sup>41</sup> So then, those who had **received his word were baptized**; and that day there **were added about three thousand souls**. <sup>42</sup> They were **continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... <sup>47</sup> praising God** and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”).
    - a. Here, again, we see salvation in discipleship beginning with faith in Jesus one’s “Lord and Christ” (2:36; Mt. 28:18, 20).
    - b. Salvation in discipleship required *repentance* and *baptism* for forgiveness of sins (2:37-38; Mt. 28:19; Lk. 24:45-47 – Luke’s GC mentions *repentance*).
    - c. Those who *obeyed* in faith were *added to the number of the saved* (2:41, 47).
    - d. And, in accordance with the Great Commission these members of Christ’s church, or Christians, continued in the apostles doctrine that they might submit to Christ as their Lord and obey Him (2:42; Eph. 1:22-23 – “And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”).
  - 3. So, whether one knows or admits to it, this is both the process and the results that **God’s truth** has laid out for the lives of those who come to Christ for salvation.
- B. When the gospel produced disciples of Christ, local churches followed.
  - 1. By a “local church” I mean a group of disciples, saved individuals, who agree to assemble and work together as a team to fulfill certain obligations given them by God.
  - 2. Where the gospel was preached, local churches were formed.
    - a. When the gospel produced disciples in Corinth, Paul then wrote to the “church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2) and addressed responsibilities such as assembling for partaking of the Lord’s Supper and edification, etc. (1 Cor. 11:23-34; 14:20-40).
    - b. When the gospel produced disciples in Galatia Paul wrote to the “churches of Galatia,” or local churches where disciples assembled to worship, etc., in Galatian (Gal. 1:2).

- c. When the gospel produced disciples in Rome Paul wrote to them and greeted the various local churches that had been formed (Rom. 16:3-5 – “Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup> who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also **all the churches of the Gentiles**; <sup>5</sup> also greet the **church that is in their house.**”).
- C. These local churches were created with divine instruction, not in “free form” style.
  - 1. When the gospel made disciples in Philippi, Paul wrote the church addressing them as “**saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons**” (Phil. 1:1).
    - a. There was structure...and it was by divine intent.
    - 2. For, this organizational structure is to be part of the framework of all local churches.
      - a. Paul and Silas work proved this (Acts 14:23 – “When they had **appointed elders for them in every church**, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”).
      - b. Paul **gave specific instructions** to Timothy and Titus concerning **appointing elders and deacons** in the churches (1 Tim 3; Titus 1).
    - 3. The local church and its structure exist by divine intent and revelation!

## II. Local church duties

- A. The local church was created to fulfill certain duties by assembling to:
  - 1. Partake of the Lord’s Supper and do so correct (1 Cor. 11:17-22 – “But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you **come together** not for the better but for the worse. <sup>18</sup> For, in the first place, when you **come together as a church**, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. <sup>19</sup> For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. <sup>20</sup> Therefore when you **meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper**, <sup>21</sup> for in your eating each **one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk.** <sup>22</sup> What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.”).
  - 2. Hold one another accountable to the Lord’s will and His standard of purity (1 Cor. 5:1-5 – “It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife. <sup>2</sup> You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. <sup>3</sup> For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. <sup>4</sup> In the name of our Lord Jesus, **when you are assembled**, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup> I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”).
  - 3. Teach and encourage one another through reciprocal singing (Col. 3:16 – “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”).
  - 4. Support the work of the Lord:
    - a. Helping their needy brethren (1 Cor. 16:1-2 – “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. <sup>2</sup> On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.”).
    - b. Supporting the preaching of the gospel.
      - i. Phil. 4:15-16 – “You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; <sup>16</sup> for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.”
      - ii. 2 Cor. 11:8 – “I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you.”

- B. We must understand that these commands and obligations cannot be faithfully fulfilled by the local church apart from the members of that local church doing their part!
1. How is the local church going to sing without members being there to sing? (Col. 3:16 – “Let the word of Christ richly **dwelt within you...teaching and admonishing one another... singing with thankfulness in your hearts** to God”)
  2. How is the local church to meet its responsibility of supporting the Lord’s work without individual members doing their part by giving?
    - a. 1 Cor. 16:2 – “**each one of you...put aside and save, as he may prosper...**”
    - b. 2 Cor. 9:7 – “each one...has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly...cheerful giver.”
  3. How can the local church properly partake of the Lord’s Supper without individuals there to do their part (1 Cor. 11:28-29, 33 – “**But a man must examine himself**, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly....<sup>33</sup> So then, my brethren, **when you come together to eat**, wait for one another.”).
  4. There is no way for the church to function separately and apart from each member doing their part.

### III. Hebrews 10:24-27

- A. Assembling together is required for faithfulness to Christ (Heb. 10:24-25 – “Let us **hold fast the confession of our hope** without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; <sup>24</sup> and let us consider how to **stimulate one another** to love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> **not forsaking our own assembling together**, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging one another**; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”).
1. Note how **assembling** as a local church is connected to holding fast to one’s **confession of hope** and is vital to one’s faithful fulfillment of his/her **duties** to one’s brethren.
    - a. So, I want to present **two conclusions** that I believe are vital to yours and this congregation’s faithfulness.
    - b. I want to preface it with the fact that I say this because I love you with all my heart.
    - c. I am going to say it **because I am convinced that it is the truth!** So, I beg you to hear me out before you pass judgment on what I am about to say!
  2. **Therefore**, you cannot fulfill your duty as a faithful Christian without faithfully/regularly assembling as an active member of a local church.
  3. **Therefore, you cannot faithfully fulfill your duties as a Christians to God and your brethren by sitting at home and watching a video feed of others worshipping!**
    - a. I know many churches of Christ and Christians did a 360 degree turn on this matter during COVID, but I believe they did so contrary to the Scriptures.
    - b. Before COVID, one aspect of the **truth** that set the church apart from denominationalism and sectarianism was the we understood that you are not assembled and you cannot properly worship God on the first day of the week sitting your pajamas on your couch at home!
  4. Why? Because when you are at home or wherever and you are watching a screen instead of physically assembling with the saints you are:
    - a. Not assembled, and **not participating in worship** the way God intends.
    - b. Not stimulating your brethren to love and good deeds. You are not teaching and admonishing your brethren in song. And you are not encouraging your brethren.
    - c. For, your presence is not felt and your voice is not heard.
- B. Before you write me off, I would remind you of the verses that follow (Heb. 10:26-27 – “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup> but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.”).
1. Some say they are not connected, that they begin a new thought.

2. Well, you better be sure of that before you decide that being a faithful member of a local church which requires coming together faithfully to worship God with the saints is not required.

CONCLUSION:

1. So, I hope that I have biblically established that being a faithful, active member of a faithful local church is part of God's plan for those who will follow Jesus.
2. And I reiterate that for one to serve Christ and faithfully fulfill his or her duties before God, that disciple must seek to be a member of a local church and physically assemble with the saints, because there are duties placed upon a disciple by God that cannot be fulfilled in any other way.
3. In the future we will continue our study the **Church vs. the Churches** and consider how the truth sets God's church apart from those created by man.
4. If you would like to be a disciple of Christ, to be a part of the saved in Christ, to fulfill your duties to Christ in the joy of your salvation, will you come to Christ in F-R-C-Bp?