

## IMPORTANCE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

The word “church” appears in 125 verses of the New Testament scriptures.

- a. But the word “church” is frequently used today in ways that are very different from the way it’s used in the New Testament.

In the New Testament, the word “church” is used with only 2 meanings.

- a. In many passages the word “church” refers to “the company of all Christians”— the universal church.
- b. In other passages the word “church” refers to “a congregation” ... a local church ... a company of Christians in a certain locality.

The local “church” is one of the most fully developed subjects in all of the New Testament.

- a. And the New Testament teaches us that:
  - ▶ A local church is a group of people in a community ...
    - who recognize and accept one another as brothers and sisters in the family of God, and
    - who agree to pool their talents and financial resources in order to work and worship together
    - under a common oversight.

For example.

- a. Local churches are mentioned frequently in the book of Acts and in the epistles, and a number of epistles are addressed to local churches.
  - ▶ Rom 16:16 ~ “The churches of Christ greet you.”
  - ▶ 1Cor 1:2 ~ “... to the church of God which is at Corinth . . .”
- b. That a local church is a group of people in a community who recognize and accept one another as brothers and sisters in the family of God is evidenced by such passages as ...
  - ▶ Ac 9:26-28 ~ “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. 28 So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.”
    - At first, the members of the church at Jerusalem refused to recognize Saul as a Christian and would not accept him into their fellowship, but they were ultimately persuaded to accept him.
  - ▶ 3Jn 10 ~ Diotrophes “himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.”
    - Because of the overbearing influence of Diotrophes the congregation was refusing to accept some into their fellowship who should have been accepted.
  - ▶ 1Cor 5
    - The church at Corinth was strongly rebuked by Paul because they were continuing to have fellowship with an immoral member who should have been rejected.
- c. That the members of a local church agree to pool their talents and financial resources is evidenced by such passages as . . .
  - ▶ Ac 4:32-35 ~ “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. . . . 34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.”

- ▶ 1Cor 16:1-2 ~ “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.”
  - ▶ 1Cor 14:26 ~ “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”
  - ▶ Rom 12:4-7 ~ “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. 6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; . . .”
- d. That the members of a local church worship and work together is evidenced by passages such as ...
- ▶ Heb 10:24-25 ~ “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, . . .”
  - ▶ Ac 20:7 ~ “Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.”
  - ▶ Php 4:15-16 ~ “Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.”
- e. That the members of a local church worship and work together under a common oversight is evidenced by such passages as ...
- ▶ Php 1:1 ~ “... to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: ...”
  - ▶ Ac 20:17 ~ “From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.”
    - v28 ~ “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

In spite of all that is said in the New Testament to local churches and about local churches, many people have the idea that ...

### **The local church really isn't all that important to the spiritual well-being of a Christian.**

Many people have a rather negative attitude toward involvement with a local church.

- a. They feel little or no need to be involved with a local congregation.
- b. They feel they can do just as well reading the Bible and praying at home, and sometimes listening to preaching on the television or radio.
- c. They feel they can be “spiritual” and “religious” without “going to church” and without being a part of a local church.

There are other people who feel they ought to be a member of a local church but their involvement with the local church is really minimal.

- a. They probably attend most Sunday morning services, but their attendance on Sunday night and Wednesday night, and their attendance during gospel meetings, is very erratic.
- b. And they have little or no involvement with the members of the church, and the work of the church, beyond attending those services.

- c. The local congregation really isn't very important to them.
  - ▶ They see *some* use for the local church ... *some* need for it — but not much.

**But the truth is:**

**The local church is important to the spiritual health of every Christian.**

- a. 1Cor 12:20-21 -- “But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”
  - ▶ The truth is: We need each other.
  - ▶ And if you have been telling yourself that you don't need to be with other Christians, and you don't need to attend the services and the Bible classes, and you don't need to be involved in the work of the church ... then you have been deceiving yourself.
- b. Eph 4:15-16 -- “... but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”
  - ▶ In Phm 1:7, Paul praises Philemon, saying, “the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.”
    - A modern-day Philemon in this congregation can refresh our hearts, too.
  - ▶ In Rom 16:2, Paul praises Phoebe, saying, “she has been a helper of many.”
    - A modern-day Phoebe in this congregation can help us, too.
  - ▶ In Ac 11:23-24, Luke tells that Barnabas was a “good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” and that he was an encouragement to the brethren in the church at Antioch.
    - A modern-day Barnabas in this congregation can be a source of encouragement to us, too.
- c. Rom 12:4-5 -- “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”
- d. Heb 10:24-25 -- “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Everything about the local church is arranged to cause the spiritual growth of every member, and it will be successful in accomplishing that goal in the life of every member who puts his faith in God's arrangements and fully co-operates with God's arrangements.

**The local church is important because: There is strength in numbers.**

- a. Eccl 4:9-12 ~ “Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. 11 Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? 12 Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

**The local church is important because: Church discipline is important.**

- a. Just as parents are to discipline their children ... for their good ... so also is the church to discipline its members ... for their good – and church discipline is primarily the responsibility of the local church.
- b. The discipline, or chastening, exercised by the local church may save a soul from death.
- c. We have an example of church discipline doing exactly that in the case of the church at Corinth finally putting out from among them the brother who had taken his father's wife.
  - ▶ 1Cor 5:5 ~ “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles — that a man has his

- father's wife! 2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. 3 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, **that his spirit may be saved** in the day of the Lord Jesus. ... 11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner — not even to eat with such a person. ... 13 But those who are outside God judges. There-fore “put away from yourselves the evil person.”
- ▶ Heb 12:11 ~ “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; neverthe-less, afterward **it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness** to those who have been trained by it.”
  - ▶ 2Cor 2:6-8 ~ “This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, 7 so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much **sorrow**. 8 Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.”

The Lord has put in place a process for dealing with a Christian who sins against a fellow Christian and that process ultimately includes the whole congregation.

- a. Matt 18:15-17 ~ “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses **even** to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”
  - ▶ Notice: “**But if he refuses even to hear the church**” – the idea is: surely he will listen if the whole church tells him he’s wrong.

**The local church is important because: The assemblies of the local church are important.**

The 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians deals with the assemblies of the church.

- a. Paul uses the word “edification” (or some form of the word) 7 times in that chapter.
- b. And he says everything done in the assemblies of the church is for the purpose of **edifying** the members.
  - ▶ v3 ~ “But he who prophesies speaks **edification** and exhortation and comfort to men.”
  - ▶ v4 ~ “He who speaks in a tongue **edifies** himself, but he who prophesies **edifies** the church.”
  - ▶ v5 ~ “I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies *is* greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive **edification**.”
  - ▶ v12 ~ “Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual *gifts*, *let it be* for the **edification** of the church *that* you seek to excel.”
  - ▶ v17 ~ “For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not **edified**.”
  - ▶ v26 ~ “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for **edification**.”

In the assemblies of the church we **pray together**.

- a. Ac 12:12 – “So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were **gathered together praying.**”

In the assemblies of the church we **sing together.**

- a. Heb 2:11-12 ~ “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying: “I will declare Your name to My brethren; **In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.**”
- b. Eph 5:19 ~ “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 **speaking to one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,
- c. Col 3:16 ~ “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, **teaching and admonishing one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”
- d. Psa 34:1-3 – “I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. 2 My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear of it and be glad. 3 Oh, magnify the LORD with me, And **let us exalt His name together.**”

In the assemblies of the church we **exhort one another.**

- a. Heb 10:24-25 ~ “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking **the assembling** of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but **exhorting one another**, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

**Ac 2:44-47** ~ “Now all who believed were **together**, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So **continuing daily with one accord in the temple**, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

**The local church is important because: The work of the local church is important.**

Rev 2:1-5 ~ “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 I know your **works**, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first **works**, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent.”

The God-given work of the local church is the work of **evangelism**, the work of **edification**, and the work of **benevolence**.

- a. Evangelism
  - ▶ 1Th 1:2-8 ~ “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 3 remembering without ceasing your **work** of faith, **labor** of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, 4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. 5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. 6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. 8 For **from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth**, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place.”
  - ▶ Php 4:15-16 ~ “Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and

receiving but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.”

- ▶ 2Cor 11:8 ~ “I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you.”
- b. Edification
  - ▶ 1Cor 14:26 ~ “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”
  - ▶ Heb 10:24-25 ~ “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”
- c. Benevolence
  - ▶ Ac 4:34-35 ~ “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.”
  - ▶ Ac 6:1-3 ~ “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ...’”
  - ▶ 1Tim 5:16 ~ “If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.”

**The local church is important because: The leadership and shepherding work of the elders is important.**

- a. Ac 20:28 ~ “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to **shepherd** the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”
- b. Heb 13:17 ~ “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for **they watch out for your souls**, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”
- c. Ezek 34:15-16 ~ “I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord GOD. 16 I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick . . .”

**The local church is important because: Everything about the local church is designed to promote our spiritual wellbeing.**

Heb 10:24-25 ~ “And let us **consider one another** in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Rom 15:30-32 ~ “Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, 31 that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be **refreshed together with you.**”

Vs32 in NIV ~ “so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and **together with you be refreshed**”

Rom 1:11-12 ~ “For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established — 12 that is, that I may be **encouraged together with you** by the mutual faith both of you and me.”

1Th 5:11 ~ “Therefore **comfort each other** and **edify one another**, just as you also are doing.”

### **Conclusion.**

Every saved person is added to the Lord’s body, the church -- the universal church.

- a. “He who believes and is baptized will be saved ...” (Mk 16:16).
- b. And the Lord adds to the church those who are being saved (Ac 2:47).

But, in order to continue in fellowship with God, you must recognize and accept the relationship you have with your brothers and sisters in Christ, and you must fulfill the responsibilities of that relationship (Rom 12:4-5).

- a. Your ultimate salvation will depend, in part, on your attitude toward the local church and what you do as a member of the local church.

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