

The Local Church

What Does The Local Church Provide Me That Nothing Else Can?

God has established three major institutions on earth: the family, civil government, and the local church. All three of these provide something that no other organization is able to give you. They are unique because God has ordained each one with leadership, accountability, and blessings. The local church has been commissioned by God to carry out his purposes in reaching the lost and perfecting the saved. The local church is a spiritual authority in your life, and God's plan for your life can only be fulfilled when connected to a local church. The purpose of this lesson is to establish the central role which the local church should play in your everyday life.

- I People have many misconceptions about a church.
 - A A church is NOT a building; it is a body of people.
 - 1 Paul and Barnabas "gathered the church (people) together".
Acts 14:27
 - 2 We can worship God in spirit and truth in any building.
John 4:24
 - 3 Your body is the temple of God.
I Corinthians 3:9, 16-17, 6:19-20
 - B A church is NOT a denominational group of congregations. The churches mentioned in the New Testament were all individual groups of believers.
Romans 16:5, I Corinthians 1:2
 - C There are many things people try to use to fill a need that only a local church can provide. These things are not wrong in themselves, and are quite often very good. God can bless these things, but they can never take the place of a church. God's work in your life is done through his body, the local church.
 - 1 Campaigns, crusades, and other informal gatherings of believers.
 - 2 Electronic media; "TV church".
 - 3 Other Christian organizations (Para-church).

God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.
John 4:24

D The local church provides specific men in specific offices for the growth and care of his flock. Again, God will bless people and efforts that honor him and his word, but a pastor in a local church cannot be replaced with other things such as these.

- 1 Bible study seminars.
- 2 Evangelists and TV / radio preachers.
- 3 Books, tapes, internet, and other Bible study tools.

II Defining a “local church”:

A A local church is an assembly of men and women who have been saved and called by God to serve him together in a specific location. They are voluntarily joined together as a single unit under clear and specific Biblical leadership. The New Testament identifies nearly fifty individual groups of believers joined together in a specific location. Colossians 1:1-2, Titus 1:5

B The Bible gives many illustrations to picture a local church.

- 1 A flock (the sheep of God’s pasture).
Acts 20:28, John 10:1-18
- 2 A building (even though a church is not a building, it is likened to one).
Ephesians 2:19-22
- 3 A bride.
Ephesians 5:25-27, II Corinthians 11:1-3

III A local church is designed to function in specific ways.

A The first local church in history and the Bible was established in Jerusalem and organized for the following purposes:
Acts 2:41-47

- 1 Teaching the word of God (verse 42).
- 2 Fellowship with other believers (verse 42).
- 3 Prayer (verse 42).
- 4 Observance of the ordinances: baptism and the Lord’s Supper (verses 41-42).
- 5 Testifying of God’s grace and power (verse 43).
- 6 Mutual assistance and ministry (verses 44-45).

*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.
Ephesians 5:25-27*

- 7 Reaching out into the community (verses 46-47).
 - 8 Glorifying and praising God (verse 47).
- B A local church is not just an organization, but a living organism of believers with new life in Christ. A church body is also likened to a human body.
- 1 Each member has a different function.
I Corinthians 12:12-20
 - 2 No one member can function alone.
I Corinthians 12:21
 - 3 Each member's contribution is vital.
I Corinthians 12:22-24
 - 4 A properly functioning body operates as a single unit.
I Corinthians 12:25-27
- C There are two offices in the local church: pastors and deacons. A local church is led by these men from within its own membership. Philippians 1:1
- 1 The role of the pastor is to shepherd the flock. The Bible uses three terms to describe the man and this office: pastors, elders, and bishops.
I Peter 5:1-4, I Timothy 3:1-7
 - 2 The role of the deacon is as a servant to the flock. He is an "under-shepherd" who serves the people of the church and assists the pastors in ministry.
I Timothy 3:8-13, Acts 6:1-8

THE KEY POINT OF THIS LESSON:

The local church is the only institution ordained by God that can fulfill the Great Commission. The design of the local church is to educate, equip, and edify the saints for the work of the ministry. The local church is established with spiritual leadership, and exists to prepare each believer to live for God, and to fulfill his individual role in the Great Commission. Ephesians 4:11-16, Matthew 28:18-20

IV Your role in the local church is vital. During your Christian life, you should grow through three broad, general stages, as outlined in Ephesians 4:12.

A You are to be perfected as a saint. This is a time to observe and learn.

Your first priority should be to submit to the teaching of the word of God and the leadership of the church so you can learn to be the person God wants you to be. Even if you have some maturity in the Lord and in the Bible, you should understand that every local church is unique in its vision. You cannot serve effectively without following leadership and proving yourself based on the particular ministry of that local church.

Hebrews 13:7, 17, I Corinthians 11:1, Matthew 11:28-30

B You are to do the work of the ministry. This is a time to participate.

In time, you will naturally grow to the point where you can begin to serve God by taking on some basic functions through the ministries that are already established in the church.

Matthew 4:19, James 1:22-25

C You are to edify the body of Christ. This is a time to lead.

As your spiritual growth continues, you will reach the point where you can begin to minister to others in the same way others have ministered to you.

II Timothy 2:2

D These three stages can be roughly compared to the stages of physical growth: childhood, youth, and adult. BE PATIENT! This process takes time. Just be sure to remain faithful to God's established institution of the local church.

*For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:
Ephesians 4:12*

Basic questions you may be asking:

If God moves me to another location, how do I find a good local church?

Pray! Ask God to direct you to the right church for you.
James 1:5

In visiting churches, most people make decisions based on external matters such as location, quality of the building, available programs, style of music, etc. However, you should observe the spiritual qualities of a particular church above those things, and compare them with the Biblical qualities of a good church:

- 1 Is the gospel the main emphasis, and are people being saved?
Matthew 7:20, Acts 2:47
- 2 Is the Bible taught and believed as the pure word of God and guide of life?
Titus 1:9
- 3 Is the membership encouraged to read and study the Bible?
Acts 17:10-12
- 4 Do people genuinely care for and minister to the needs of others?
Acts 6:1
- 5 Does the church support and send out missionaries?
Acts 13:1-3

Do you have any other questions about this subject?

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION:

There are many popular beliefs which are contrary to the truths of the word of God. A discussion of these issues in light of the principles you just learned should give you a proper understanding of this lesson and correct some of these misconceptions:

- 1.) If the church is likened to a flock, what is the role of the shepherd?

- 2.) What are the main ways a healthy church body operates?

- 3.) What are some things people try to replace a church with, and why don't they work?

- 4.) Who in the church is charged with the responsibility to meet people's spiritual needs?

Memory Verses:

Ephesians 4:11-12: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

I Corinthians 12:27: "Now are ye the body of Christ, and members in particular."

II Timothy 2:2: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."