

FIRMLY ROOTED | THE LOCAL CHURCH

God created three major institutions: family, government, and the local church. What is meant by the word “church”? Some think it is a religious clinic, a place where people go to get their problems solved. Still others think it is a religious gymnasium where performing moral and spiritual exercises makes them stronger. Neither of these concepts, though they are suggestive, is by itself adequate. So, what is the church? It is the community of those who belong to Christ’s Spirit through trust and loyalty. The church is the “body of Christ,” the spiritual body through which the mind, spirit, will, and heart function.

Why do we need the church? God has made us for Himself, His ways, and His purposes. We should consciously respond to His call and come with other believers. We come together for various reasons: to praise Him; to pray to Him; to listen to His spirit speaking guidance for us through scripture, sermons, and praise. We live fragmented, divided lives. We need the wholeness which the church offers. In this lesson, we will explore why we should become part of a local church and how to do so.

THE LOCAL CHURCH

Often, people hold preconceived ideas about organized religion based on personal experience. They try to interpret God and His power through a ministry or a minister. The only problem with this is that no matter how wonderful the minister or the ministry might be, it is human and subject to failure, whereas God is perfect in every way and can never fail. Unfortunately, because of these kinds of experiences, many people are left with many unanswered questions about the church and the very character of God Himself. Let’s look at what the local church is all about, what it is, and what it is not.

WHAT THE LOCAL CHURCH IS NOT

Sometimes, to help define what something is, it’s good to look at what it isn’t. The church is not a building. Although we might go to a certain location, the building is not the church. You can have church anywhere. The real church is people.

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 1 Cor 6:19

The Bible says that we are the temple of God. God is not so much concerned with the ‘where’ as He is with the ‘how’.

God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:24

The church is not even a group of people, such as a denomination or a congregation. It is not a type of membership or a list of rules and regulations.

WHAT IS THE LOCAL CHURCH?

A local church is made up of a body of believers who are called to serve God in a specific area; a place where people can grow spiritually and find direction for their spiritual journey. It is a resource for teaching, encouragement, and growth. The local church is a place where believers can come together to support local, national, and international projects through missions; a place in which to worship and give thanks to God; a place where you can develop your love walk with other believers; a place where you can learn to be a disciple and also learn to disciple others; a place where the power of God can manifest itself through the gifts of the Spirit.

When the Bible speaks of “the church,” it refers either to a local church or to the church, the entire body of Christ.

And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. 1 Cor 12:28

Paul is speaking to believers and clearly states that we are the body of Christ.

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 1 Cor 12:27

The apostle Paul compares the church to the human body: it is made up of many parts, all necessary and working together in harmony.

For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 1 Cor 12:14-20

This describes how the church should function. Each member has a different function, but no one part functions alone. Each part is significant and valuable to all the other members, so to be successful, we must function as a unit.

WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS & BENEFITS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH?

The local church serves many purposes. We can see this in the Bible from one of the first local churches established.

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 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, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:41-47

The local church was established for many reasons:

1. To teach the Word of God
2. Fellowship
3. Prayer
4. Communion
5. Baptism
6. To be a testimony of God's power
7. To help each other
8. To do the work of the ministry
9. To reach out into the community
10. To glorify and praise God

The local church is to be a support in these areas of your life. However, we find the primary reason for the local church here in the book of Ephesians:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – 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. Eph 4:11-16

The single most important job of the local church is to build up the believer, to teach, and to strengthen the saints.

The local church is to function much like a family unit. When you are in need or have cares, your family is there to help you through. Family members are committed to each other for life, not just in the good times.

But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. Titus 2:1-8

WHAT IS MY PART IN THE LOCAL CHURCH?

Each of us has a significant role to play in the local church. Your attendance, attitude, words, prayers, enthusiasm (or lack thereof), giving, and faithfulness all play a part in how you perceive the local church and how others will see it as well. Here is a list of some practical things to help you fulfill your responsibilities to the church.

a.) Come ready to be taught and to learn. Draw on the ministry gifts that God has set in the church. Be teachable!

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...Eph 4:11-12

Come hungry for more of God, come expecting, believing that God is going to do something.

b.) Support the church with faithful attendance

...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. Heb 10:25

c.) Support the Church by giving tithes and offerings

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it. Mal 3:8-10

Tithes are different from offerings. The word "tithe" means a tenth and offerings are what you decide to give over and above the tithe.

Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you." Luke 6:38

d.) Support the church by getting involved. The most content Christians are the ones who are actively involved. People want a sense of belonging that comes from taking ownership and getting involved. It helps you develop meaningful relationships and gives you the satisfaction of knowing you are personally helping to accomplish God's plan for the church.

e.) Support the church by taking on leadership roles. As you grow and mature in the Lord, you should reach the point where you are able to lead others.

f.) Pray for the church. It is the responsibility of church members to pray for the church. The local church can't function without the power of prayer. Pray for the minister, for the members, for the harvest, for resources and finances, direction, and wisdom. Pray as the Lord leads.

WHAT DOES GOD EXPECT FROM ME AS A MEMBER OF A LOCAL CHURCH?

Love one another. We are called to walk in love towards each other.

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. Rom 8:9

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, Rom 8:16

You have the Spirit in you, but we're talking about a further experience of being filled with the Spirit. You must ask God to fill you.

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" Luke 11:13

Therefore, if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. The Humbled and Exalted Christ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. Phil 2:1-5

Evangelize and make disciples of others. Each one of us has a responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission in our lives.

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. Mark 16:15-16

Submit yourself to spiritual leadership. The Bible requires us to submit ourselves to godly men who will lead, teach, and be an example to us.

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. Heb 13:17

HOW DO I FIND A LOCAL CHURCH IN WHICH GOD WANTS ME TO SERVE?

1. Don't look for a perfect church. They don't exist; they are made up of imperfect people.
2. Make a list of questions that are important to you. Things to look for: worship, children's ministry, youth, seniors, outreach, fellowship, teaching, etc.
3. Look at the practical things: location, service schedules, programs, and classes that meet your needs.
4. Visit churches, check them out. Go with an open mind.

5. Pray and ask God where you should go to church. God will tell you where you should go.
6. Attend a Bible-believing church, one that will encourage you and teach the Word properly.
7. Once you have found a church, jump in and get involved, be committed, be faithful, and serve.

The local church is meant to be a blessing in the life of the believer. God intends for everyone to be a part of a local church. If you are not, you are missing out on part of God's plan for your life.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, Eph 4:11-14

Be of the same mind toward one another, Rom. 12:16

For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. 1 Cor 10:17

POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE CHURCH

- Belonging to a church can save you.
- One denomination is better than another.
- The church is only for holidays.
- Church is not relevant anymore.
- All the church cares about is money.
- Church people think they are better than everyone else.
- I don't have to go to church; I can watch it on TV.

From this lesson, you should know that these misconceptions are wrong and why.

THOUGHTS

We ought to regard the church not as a luxurious hostelry where Christian gentlemen may each one dwell at ease in his own inn, but as a barracks in which soldiers are gathered together to be drilled and trained for war. We should regard the church not as an association for mutual admiration and comfort, but as an army with banners, marching to the fray, to achieve victories for Christ, to storm the strongholds of the foe, and to add province after province to the redeemer's kingdom. *Charles Spurgeon*

The achievements of an organization are the result of the combined efforts of everyone. *Vince Lombardi*

Absolutely nothing will revitalize a discouraged church faster than rediscovering its purpose. *Rick Warren*

A pastor is an unusual person, indeed! He gets his assignments from a voice no one else can hear. He works for a bonus check that is only legal tender in heaven. He starts his day in the prayer closet instead of the wardrobe closet. He climbs the ladder of success by taking the lowly place. He receives nourishment by feeding sheep. His greatest gains come by what he gives away. He is more attracted to what people look like inwardly than outwardly. He lives for God's approval rather than following the opinions of others. He speaks from the depths of his heart rather than from the top of his head. His richest treasures come from the investments he makes in the lives of others. *Roy Lessin*

The mission of every church is the mission of Christ and the apostles - to give the gospel to the whole world. That means that every church is a missionary organization. All the world is its field. *Stacy Warburton*

Essentially, the church has many responsibilities but only one mission, and that is the evangelization and discipling of all nations. *Daniel Bacon*

The New Testament is plain and definite. Christ came to establish a world-wide Kingdom of righteousness and love. He made the accomplishment of this purpose the primary obligation of His Church. *Egbert W. Smith*

There is no argument for missions. The entire action of God in history, the whole revelation of God in Christ--that is the argument. *James S. Steward*

God is a missionary God. The Bible is a missionary book. The gospel is a missionary message. The church is a missionary institution. And when the church ceases to be missionary minded, it has denied its faith and betrayed its trust. *J. Herbert Kane*

Missions are the chief end of the Church. ...the chief end of the ministry ought to be to equip the Church for this. Each congregation is meant to be a training class. *Andrew Murray*

MEMORY VERSES

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. Eph 1:22-23

Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, And His praise in the assembly of saints. Ps 149:1

...but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. 1 Tim 3:15

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 1 Cor 12:27

QUESTIONS

Please answer the following questions:

1) Can you list four of the functions of the local church?

2) Can you name three benefits of the local church?

3) Can you list three responsibilities that you have to your local church?
