

## THE LOCAL CHURCH

One of the most important steps that a Christian will take on the road to growing in grace is the step of finding a church home. As a matter of fact, one's spiritual maturity will often rise or fall in direct relationship to "*The Local Church*" he becomes a member of, the faithfulness with which he attends, and the scope of his involvement.

The church is very important in this day and age. It is one of the three major institutions that God has established on this earth, the other two being the family, and civil government. All three were established by God for the accomplishment of God's plan and the fulfillment of God's purpose for the human race. It is "*The Local Church*," however, that has been commissioned by God to carry out His purpose of edifying and encouraging the saints and of reaching the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is God's institution for worship, service, evangelism, missions, as well as every other spiritual ministry that God has given to man. Therefore, we can expect to find that God's plan for the Christian will always be fulfilled best when it is not only associated with, but also connected to, "*The Local Church*."

Since our relationship to the church is directly influenced by our understanding of the church, we need to know something of *its meaning*, *its ministry*, and *its membership*. The purpose of this lesson is to impress upon your heart and mind the central role that the church should play in your everyday life.

## I. THE MEANING OF THE CHURCH

### A. What The Church Is Not

#### 1. The church it is not a building.

- a. Sometimes we hear people refer to the building that the church meets at as the church, or the temple.
- b. Though this building may be the place where the church meets, this building is not the church.
- c. The Holy Spirit does not dwell in a building. Where, according to the Bible, does the Spirit of God dwell? (*I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19*) \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. The church is not a particular denominational group of congregations.

- a. Sometimes people speak of particular denominations as being the church.
- b. Different people sometimes make reference to the Baptist church, or the Methodist church, or the Lutheran church, or the Catholic church, etc ...
- c. The Bible never uses the word church to refer to a particular denomination as a whole.

### B. What The Church Is

#### 1. The church is a called-out assembly.

- a. The word "*church*" actually comes from the Greek word "*ekklesia*," which is from two Greek words meaning, "*to call out from*."
- b. Thus, a church is a group that's been called out so that it's somewhat separate and distinct from its surroundings.
- c. The New Testament Church is a called-out assembly, however, it is not just any assembly.

#### 2. The church is a special called-out assembly.

- a. It is a special called-out assembly that has Christ as its head and is itself termed the body of Christ.
- b. "*And (God) hath put all things under his (Christ) feet, and gave him to be the \_\_\_\_\_ over all things to the church, which is his \_\_\_\_\_, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*" (*Ephesians 1: 22-23*)
- c. The church, therefore, is a group of saved people assembled together and constituted as members of the body of Christ.

## C. The Bible Speaks Of The New Testament Church In A Two-Fold Sense.

### 1. It speaks of the total body of Christ.

a. This would include all believers, whether living today or already departed, who have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ.

b. *"For as the \_\_\_\_\_ is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one, \_\_\_\_\_, being many, are one \_\_\_\_\_ : so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one \_\_\_\_\_, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (I Corinthians 12:12-13)*

c. There are saved people from every tongue and every nation upon the face of the earth, and as such, they are members of the body of Christ.

### 2. It speaks of the local body of Christ.

a. The main emphasis of the church in Scripture is upon this local aspect of the church. Of its 114 occurrences in the New Testament, over 100 refer to the local church.

b. The local church is a body of believers who have been saved, baptized, and called by God to serve in a specific area or community.

c. Both aspects of the church (*the local and total body*) can be seen together in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. *"Unto the \_\_\_\_\_ of God which is at \_\_\_\_\_, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with \_\_\_\_\_ that in \_\_\_\_\_ place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." (I Corinthians 1:2)*

## II .THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

### A. What The Ministry Of The Local Church Is Not

#### 1. It is not to eradicate the evils of society.

a. Nowhere in the New Testament is the church told to lobby for stronger pollution laws, or march for civil rights, or stage protests against unpopular wars.

b. Although the local church must stand up and speak out against sin and immorality, its purpose is not to expend all of its efforts, energies, and resources fighting the evils of this world.

c. It is not the purpose of the church to try and save this world from destruction. This world is under the curse of Almighty God, and one day God Himself shall destroy it.

#### 2. It is not to imitate the actions of society.

a. There should be a notable difference between the church and the world.

b. Paul said the church is not to be \_\_\_\_\_ to this world. (*Romans 12:2*)

c. It has been said that the church today has become so worldly, and the world today has become so churchy, one can scarcely tell the difference between the two.

### 3. It is not to isolate itself from the people of society.

- a. Some seem to think they can escape the perversions of the world by removing themselves from the peoples of this world. But God never intended for the church to spend its life in silent contemplation.
- b. While it is true that the church is in this world, it is not to be \_\_\_\_\_ this world. (*John 17:14*)
- c. Jesus prayed not that we be taken out of the world, but that we be kept from the \_\_\_\_\_ . (*John 17:15*)

## B. What The Ministry Of The Local Church Is

### 1. It is to bring glory to God.

- a. "Unto him be \_\_\_\_\_ in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." (*Ephesians 3:21*)
- b. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the \_\_\_\_\_ of God." (*I Corinthians 10:31*)
- c. "That ye may with one mind and one mouth \_\_\_\_\_ God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (*Romans 15:6*)

### 2. It is to evangelize the world with the gospel.

- a. The "Great Commission" was given by the Lord Jesus Christ and is recorded for us in *Matthew 28:19-20*. What three things does this commission entail? \_\_\_\_\_

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- b. But ye shall receive \_\_\_\_\_ , after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be \_\_\_\_\_ unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (*Acts 1:8*)
- c. "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus Christ." (*Acts 5:42*)

### 3. It is to provide fellowship for believers.

- a. God has designed men for fellowship. Therefore, the church was never intended to be a building where lonely people walk in, listen, and walk out, still alone, but rather it is to be a body of fellowship.
- b. 'They that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and \_\_\_\_\_ , and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.'" (*Acts 2:41-42*)
- c. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your \_\_\_\_\_ in the gospel from the first day until now." (*Philippians 1:3-5*)

#### 4. It is to develop and strengthen the saints.

a. The Bible speaks of gifted men given by the Lord to the church. Who are they?  
(Ephesians 4:11) \_\_\_\_\_

b. List three reasons why they were given. (Ephesians 4:12) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c. During your Christian life, you should grow through these three general stages of development.

*(1) **The perfecting of the saints** - your first priority should be to submit to the teaching of God's Word so that you can learn to become the person God wants you to be.*

*(2) **The work of the ministry** - in time you should grow to the point where you can serve the Lord through participating in the established ministries of the local church.*

*(3) **The edifying of the body of Christ** - as your growth continues you should reach the point where you can minister to others in the same way they have ministered to you.*

### III. THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHURCH

#### A. How To Find A Church That Is Right For You

##### 1. Ask God to lead you to the right church.

a. "If any of you lack \_\_\_\_\_, let him ask of \_\_\_\_\_, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (James 1:5)

b. "And all things, whatsoever ye shall \_\_\_\_\_ in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." (Matthew 21:22)

##### 2. Make sure that it meets the Scriptural requirement~.

a. Do they believe and teach the Bible as the complete and infallible Word of God, and do they encourage all the membership to read and study it? (II Timothy 3:16)

b. Do they believe in salvation by grace alone, through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ? (Ephesians 2:8-9)

c. Do they send out and support missionaries, and is there a genuine evidence of soul winning? (Mark 16:15)

**Conclusion:** Are you a member of the local church? If not, I trust that you soon will be! (Memorize: Hebrews 10:25)