

Why The Local Church

I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Matthew 16:18

In this lesson we will learn what the church is and how we should view the local church. Today there are many confusing and conflicting views about the church, its role, and its function in our lives as the people of God. One thing I would like to point out straight away is that the ‘church’ is not the brick building that we meet inside on the Lord’s Day. According to the Bible the church is a fellowship of believers assembled for worship, praise and honour of God. The church is the body of believers gathered together.

Many people today understand the church as a building. This is not a biblical understanding of the word church. The word “church” comes from the Greek word ekklesia which is a called out assembly of Christian people. The church of God gathers together in the building. In New Testament times churches met in the homes of believers, which were called house churches. There were no buildings called churches in the early Christian age nor were there any buildings owned by the fellowship and used for public worship and services.

Romans 16:5 says, “also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.” Paul writes about the church that is in their house. Churches in the New Testament met in believers homes on the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day (Sunday).

On the Lord’s Day believers gather together to give thanks, worship, pray and sing the praises of God (Acts 20:7). The first day of the week is called the Lord’s Day. Christians should use the name “Lord’s Day” for the first day of the week and not Sunday. Attending meetings is important not only to you but to the other believers.

The Church Universal or Local

The local church is depicted in Galatians chapter 1 as being a group of believers in a local area gathering together for worship and the praise of God. Here we see that there are many churches in the region of Galatia. The universal church is everyone who belongs to Christ and who have accepted Him as their personal Lord and Saviour. There is a difference between the universal body of Christ and the local church body.

The universal church is the family of God’s people that every born-again believer belongs to. The local church is a local fellowship of believers who meet in a particular location on a regular basis. For example, on a Lord’s Day for worship or once a week for a prayer meeting and Bible study. All of the letters to churches in the New Testament are to local churches dealing with local issues and questions (1 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:2 and Colossians 1:2). To put it another way I am a member of the universal body of believers in Christ, but not a member of every single local church throughout the world. If you join a local Presbyterian church, it does not make you a member of every Presbyterian Church in the country. The same would apply to a Baptist Church, Methodist Church, Congregational Church and so on. Each local assembly of believers are independent from each other.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 16:19. Where are the churches? _____

Turn to Colossians 4:15. Where is the church? _____

Turn to 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. What is your body? _____

The Bible says that God's Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us when we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Saviour. The third person of the Godhead lives within you, leads you and guides you on your spiritual journey of faith (John 14:26 and 1 John 2:20, 27).

Here the local church is viewed as the temple of God. Verse 17 warns us that if any man contributes to the collapse of a local church he must be severely disciplined by the Lord. As the local church is a lighthouse of the Gospel in the village, town, and local community.

The church is the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12. Paul used the illustration of our physical body to show us how important each member of the church is to God. Just like our physical bodies we have different parts for different reasons and functions. We have eyes to see, hands to touch and hold things, we have legs to support our body when we walk, and we have teeth to help us chew our food. The same with the body of believers we have different roles to do in the church to help the body of Christ to be a fully functioning church, without every part of the body, the body is incomplete.

The role of the church is to preach the Gospel to the lost, to teach the believers the doctrines of the Bible, to rebuke error, to train believers for ministry, to give practical Christian life lessons and tools, to encourage one another in service, to pray for needs and to support one another with spiritual matters and other needs.

The church should also be a worshiping people, a prayerful people, and a loving and caring people. The church should also have the needs of the local community in mind and the greater good of the nation in which God has placed the local church in. The building is just the place where the believers meet to worship on the Lord's Day. The church building should always be a place set aside from the world and worldliness.

In Matthew 28:19-20 we have the teaching that is called the Great Commission. Turn to this passage and fill in the missing words.

"Go therefore and make _____ of all the _____, baptizing them in the name of the _____ and the _____ and the Holy _____, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the _____ of the age."

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said He would build His church on earth with a foundation of a rock. Jesus used a play on words He did not say that He would build His church upon Peter. Jesus was talking about Peter's profession of faith in verse 16 where Peter declares his belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus is referring to this solid rock of faith, this divine revelation that Peter spoke of, that Christ is the Son of the living God.

Why should I meet with other believers?

Meeting with other believers is God's commandment for His people. God has given the local church for the edification of believers and for His work in the local area. God's word teaches that His people should meet regularly and publicly for worship. It is important for believers to meet to exhort one another and to encourage each other to serve God and His will.

In Hebrews 10:25 the Bible encourages us to not forsake the gathering of God's people. It is very important for the people of God to commit themselves to a good Bible believing church in their local area. The importance of submitting to the loving leadership of a church is one of the most fundamental elements of being a healthy child of God. In 1 Thessalonians 5:11 the Bible says, "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing."

As we have just learnt in 1 Corinthians 12 just meeting together on Lord's Day's for worship is not enough, we need to be active and part of the working ministry of the local church. This can be praying for the needs of the church and others, helping with the running of the church, reaching the lost with the Gospel and encouraging fellow believers. Remember, as we have already learnt our good deeds do not save us, but we desire to work for the Lord to honour him and to please him. Meeting together for fellowship is important as we learn from the list of Scripture verses below.

Romans 12:10 says, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor."

Romans 15:14 says, "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another."

Hebrews 3:13 says, "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

1 John 4:12 says, "No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us."

Galatians 5:13 says, "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

Ephesians 4:32 says, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

Lesson Summary

In this lesson we have learnt that the church is a local body of believers and that the believers belong to the universal body of Christ. The body of believers are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells richly in them. We have also learnt the role of the church and how important each member is to the ministry of the church.

We learnt in 1 Corinthians 12 that the local church is a local body of believers. We have learnt that everyone has a different job in the local church. This is so that the local church can point lost souls to the Lord, teach them the truth of the Lord and baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Without the local church the body of Christ cannot exist on earth.

Be aware of the ways of Satan. Do not fall into the trap of believing you are part of a universal church denomination. Commit yourself to the Lord by joining a good Bible believing local church. God has chosen the means of the church to share the Good News of

the Lord in your area, and to be a beacon of hope to the lost and to be a living sacrifice of faith in your area. Will you follow God and submit to His perfect will?

Remembrance verse

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