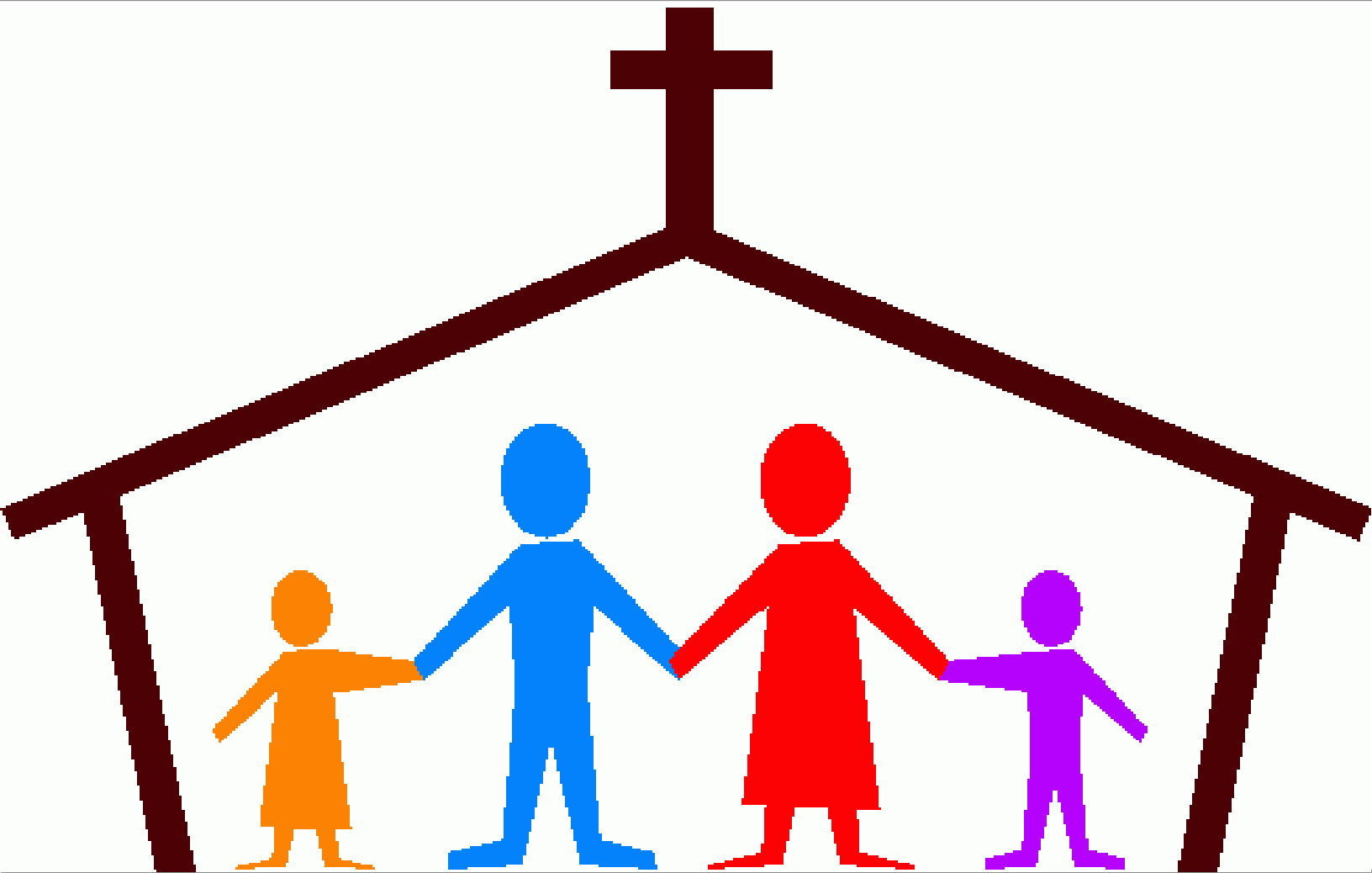


The Church Of Christ



The Church Of Christ

Learn about the one church Jesus Christ established that you can read about in the New Testament

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

Study Number: DGW131

Written by Eric Krieg

About the author: My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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The Church Of Christ

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The Church Of Christ

Lesson 1:

Ekklesia

What is the church of Christ? Perhaps you have considered this question before or have even studied this question with someone else. Certainly, the word “church” has come to be used in many different ways in our society today, having reference to a large number of different things.

But, how is the word used in the Bible? What does the word “church” really mean? Who is part of the church? How do you join the church? When did the church come into existence? Has it even been established? What is the church to be called? Why does the word “church” seem to be used in different ways in the Scriptures? What is the work of local churches of Christ? What are the assemblies of local churches of Christ like? What should the organizational structure of the church of Christ be?

These are the sorts of questions we will be attempting to answer during the course of this 8-lesson study about the church of Christ. It is my hope that this study will help you better understand what the Bible teaches on the subject of the church – and that this study will enable you to help others come to a knowledge of the truth on this subject.

As you engage in this Bible study (as always), please carefully consider the things presented with an open Bible and an open mind. Please carefully evaluate what the Scriptures teach to see what the truth in God’s word is on the subject of the church. Do not allow preconceived ideas to hinder you from seeing what the Bible teaches on the subject. Be open to any and all of the truths contained within the pages of God’s word. After all, it is God’s word that will judge us in the Last Day (see John 12:48 and Revelation 20:11-15). Also, I encourage you not to take my word for anything! It is my hope

only to teach the truth of God’s word. However, I encourage you to search the Scriptures for yourself and see if the conclusions we draw during the course of this study are in harmony with the way of truth or not! Be like the Bereans (in Acts 17:11) and search the Scriptures daily in order to see whether the things you are being taught are truth or not.

In this first lesson, we want to take some time to evaluate the use of the Greek word “ekklesia.” This is the Greek word that is often translated “church” in our English Bibles (Remember that the New Testament was originally written in the Greek language – and has been translated from the Greek into English). As we will see, this Greek word is used frequently in the pages of the New Testament – and it will be the focus of this first study. For instance, when Jesus said, “I will build My church” in Matthew 16:18, the word “ekklesia” is used. This first study aims to help you gain a more accurate understanding of what the word “church” really means so that we can build upon this foundation in future lessons.

Why This Study Is Important

Why do you need to know anything about the Greek word “ekklesia”? Maybe you are thinking that a study of a Greek word sounds dry, boring, and irrelevant to your life – and are about to skip over this lesson. Before you decide that this lesson has no relevance to your life, please allow me to briefly explain why it is important for you to consider this study.

Not because you have to be well-versed in the Greek language

God does not require you to know one syllable of the Greek language in order to be saved. Certainly, God does not require or expect you to learn Greek in order to learn what He commands or expects of you during your life. You can live your life in a way that pleases God without knowing the Greek language. However, a study of this Greek word will *aid* in your understanding on the subject of the church.

So you can speak as the oracles of God

Actually, this study will not be an in-depth study of this Greek word at all. I readily admit to you that I know very little about the Greek language. What we are aiming to do in this study is to observe many passages in which this Greek word is used so that we can gain a greater understanding of the English word “church.”

Sometimes, we can be guilty of using terms in ways that God does not use them – as our society and culture changes the meanings of words. You see, English words evolve in their meanings over time. For instance, the word “conversation” is used in the King James Version of the Bible (originally published in 1611 A.D.) to identify our manner of life (see Ephesians 4:22). However, this English word “conversation” has evolved to refer specifically to our verbal interaction with others. Another example of English words evolving in meaning is the use of the word “gay.” In the mid-1900s, the English word “gay” meant “happy.” However, now (in the early part of the 21st century) the word refers to homosexual behavior. So, our English words evolve.

Since this is the case, it is profitable to go back to the original Greek word “ekklesia” and study this term in its original context in order to see what God refers to whenever He uses this word. Many times, mankind has changed the meanings of certain words God has used in the Scriptures. Let me give you two modern-day examples of this.

(1) The word “baptism.” Today, it is common for folks to speak of the English word “baptism” when they speak of the actions of having water sprinkled or poured over another’s head. However, God does not use the word “baptism” in this way. Instead, a study of the Greek word for “baptism” and its use in the Scriptures reveals that God is *always* talking about an immersion or overwhelming. So, as it should be applied today, baptism (by God’s standards) can only be accomplished by the immersion in water. Acts 8:38-39 is one example which demonstrates this to be true.

(2) The word “Christian.” Today, it is common for folks to use the English word “Christian” whenever they speak about folks who profess to follow Jesus Christ. The word is used then to refer to anyone of any denomination – as long as they profess allegiance to Jesus Christ (regardless of what doctrine they believe and follow). However, a

study of how this word is used in the Bible would help us to understand that Christians are disciples of Jesus Christ (Acts 11:26). Then, as we would study what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, we would discover that it does not just refer to someone who professes allegiance to Christ; but, someone who is entirely dedicated to learning from Him and obeying Him (see Matthew 7:21-23 and Luke 9:23-26). Furthermore, a study of being a Christian would conclude that only those who have obeyed God’s plan of salvation are truly Christians. God’s plan of salvation is to hear His word (Romans 10:17), believe (John 8:24), repent (Acts 17:30), confess Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Then, the one who has become a Christian is expected to remain faithful to God throughout his/her earthly life (Revelation 2:10).

In the same way, it is common for folks to use the word “church” in ways that do not quite match up with how the Bible uses the word. While this may seem “innocent” and “harmless,” it actually results in great spiritual harm! We will consider some of the ways in which the word “church” is misapplied momentarily.

For now, please make it your desire to speak as the oracles of God. 1 Peter 4:11 says, “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God...” I hope that your desire is to speak as the Bible speaks. We should always desire to use words and phrases in the ways God intends them to be used rather than forcing a word or phrase to mean something God has never intended! Therefore, if this is your desire, please realize that the word “church” has often been misused in our society – and take a moment to clear away any ideas you may have had, opening your mind to allow the Bible to show you how the word is to be used and determine to apply it in the proper way!

So we can set the proper foundation for our study

A thing can only be as good as its foundation. Jesus demonstrated this to be true in Matthew 7:24-27: “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who

built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

This house which was built upon the sand could have been the most ornate, beautiful, and well-constructed house imaginable. However, because of its poor foundation, it did not endure! The same is true concerning our understandings of Biblical words and concepts. We may believe we have a firm understanding of particular concepts and doctrines; but, if they do not have the proper foundations, they will not endure – no matter how beautiful we may be able to articulate our ideas about them.

You must be careful to gain a proper understanding of the use of this word in the Scriptures in order to properly grasp the other teachings about the church you can read about in the Bible! If you do not have a proper understanding about how the word is used in Scripture, the other teachings you need to learn concerning the church may not make any sense to you! Therefore, laying the proper foundation is necessary – and this lesson attempts to accomplish that goal.

So you can overcome misconceptions of the church

Since the word “church” is commonly misapplied in today’s society, it is possible that you have a misconception of the church that needs to be corrected. Again, many of these misconceptions get to the very foundation we will be addressing during the course of this lesson. Therefore, no matter what your view of the “church” is, I simply ask that you be open and honest with yourself and with the Scriptures as we begin this study – and acknowledge the *possibility* that you could have a misconception about the church! Then, if such a misconception does exist, I hope that this lesson will help you to begin destroying the weak foundation you have been building on and establish the firm foundation that is based entirely upon God’s word!

Common Misconceptions About The Church

Before we consider how the Bible does use the word “ekklesia” (church), let me take a few

moments to identify some things the Bible does *not* refer to when it uses this word. Take some time to consider the following common misconceptions about what the church is. Again, be honest with yourself and allow any false ideas that are present in your mind about the church to be destroyed so that you can build the right foundation! You can search the Scriptures repeatedly and never once find the church referenced in any of the following ways!

An earthly organization

Those who lived during Jesus’ lifetime were looking for Christ to set up an earthly kingdom. Many folks today have not made an improvement in their concept of this kingdom (church). Often, folks still see the church only through a physical lens – often making it into nothing more than an earthly organization.

Consider some characteristics of an earthly organization – as churches today often have been made to resemble these. (1) Hierarchical systems that have CEOs, boards of directors, managers, employees, etc. In these systems, those in the greatest positions of authority make changes to the rules and regulations. In business, this is good and proper. However, regarding the church, there must not be central governing bodies, counsels, or human heads of any kind (like the Pope), etc. who make “policies” regarding the doctrines of the church! The Bible is the church’s only guide and Christ is the church’s only Head! (2) Business-oriented goals. Businesses *should* think about customers and finances. However, churches cannot be driven by financial ramifications or be engaged in “people pleasing.” Both will lead to a perversion of God’s plan! Instead, the church must be concerned about spiritual things (i.e. souls)! (3) Fundraising. Businesses and secular organizations seek to increase their “bottom line.” They will try to do as much as they can to accomplish this. The church that is viewed as an earthly organization will also likely be engaged in fundraising activities that are unauthorized by the Scriptures (i.e. bake sales, rummage sales, etc.).

A social club

Many have misguided views about the subject of fellowship. To many, fellowship is primarily concerned with physical things. Certainly, fellowship between Christians is important! However, the fellowship discussed in the Scriptures

is a spiritual fellowship (see 1 John 1:7). Then, due to this spiritual fellowship, it will prompt Christians to be close on a physical level as well. Even still, it is not the role of the church to provide for and organize such social gatherings/events – as there is *no authority* in the Bible for such as the work of the church!

Consider some characteristics of the church that views itself as a social club. (1) It will often have assemblies that “water down” God’s word (since the primary focus often becomes physical socialization rather than spiritual instruction and edification). (2) It will often be involved in putting on plays, field trips, singles’ nights, movie nights, and other entertaining activities. (3) It will often build, maintain, and utilize gymnasiums or similar facilities. (4) It will often build, maintain, and utilize “fellowship halls” (i.e. kitchens). Other similar characteristics often manifest themselves in the church that views itself as a social club.

A political machine

Some churches have stopped speaking God’s word and have exchanged it for the “social gospel” (read Galatians 1:6-10 to see that God authorizes no changes to His gospel). They begin focusing on social issues or become political activists. Now, please understand that individuals have the opportunity to be involved in politics and social issues; but, this is not the God-given role of the church (except as it may influence individuals and societies through the teaching of God’s word).

Consider some characteristics of churches that view themselves as political machines. (1) They often stop preaching God’s word. (2) They will often present (so-called) “sermons” that are filled with “culturally-relevant” matters. (3) They will often present (so-called) “sermons” concerned with being “politically correct” (i.e. no longer speaking out against homosexuality, abortion, divorce for any cause, women preachers/elders/deacons, etc.).

A building where religious people meet together

Some folks act and talk as if the church is nothing more than a building where religious people come together. However, when Saul was persecuting the church (in Acts 8:1-3), what was he doing? Was he destroying a physical structure by using hammers, saws, and such things? Or, was he harming the

people who belonged to Jesus Christ? The answer is obvious from the text. Yet, many people today talk of “going to church” as if the church is a physical structure!

Consider some characteristics of a church that becomes nothing but a meeting place. (1) Members of that “church” will probably view their responsibilities lightly (if they recognize any responsibility at all). This is only reasonable. After all, if you are someone who “attends church” it carries far less responsibility than being part of the church! (2) Members who have this view of the church will be less likely to become involved in one another’s lives. They will only view one another as attending the same church (gathering at the same building) every once in a while. They will not be devoted to helping one another live in the way God wants His people to be living. (3) It often develops the “see you next week” mentality. This mentality is demonstrated when people gather together “at church,” leave “church” (the building), and have minimal contact or interaction with one another until the next “meeting.”

Christ

Some churches have reversed their role with Christ’s role. These churches see themselves as being the head of the body, rather than giving Christ that exalted position. Colossians 1:18 sets these roles straight: “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” Christ is the Head of the body (which is the church). Yet, *churches* often begin to be seen as the giver and interpreter of the law. The Pope, bishops, priests, counsels, central governing bodies, “church creeds,” etc. are all proof of this.

Furthermore, the church can be viewed as the savior, rather than Christ! Some believe that as long as they are on some church’s “membership role” that they will go to Heaven. However, as we will observe, the church is the saved (i.e. it is composed of those who are saved). If an individual is not living properly in the eyes of God, he/she will not be saved (no matter what church’s membership role he/she is on)!

There are certainly some problems concerning the church that exalts itself to the role of Christ. (1) It dictates and changes the law rather than simply upholding the law that God has revealed. (2) It becomes a human organization that submits to men

and women rather than a spiritual kingdom that is subject only to Jesus Christ. (3) It may teach salvation through a church rather than salvation through Jesus Christ!

A group of denominations

The church is often believed to be a collection of all the (so-called) “Christians” from all of the various churches. So, the church is often believed to consist of “Christians” from the Catholic Church, “Christians” from the Baptist Church, “Christians” from the Methodist Church, “Christians” from the Lutheran Church, “Christians” from the Pentecostal Church, “Christians” from the Nazarene Church, etc., etc., etc.

Therefore, what has been created is known as “unity in diversity” (or, ecumenism). That is, folks believe that we can all believe and follow the Scriptures differently – but all still be acceptable to God and be part of the one church of Christ. However, this is **not** the true unity that is described and commanded within the pages of the Bible. Consider the unity God demands, as described in 1 Corinthians 1:10: “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

Furthermore, this concept of the church entirely misses the teachings of the church in the Scriptures! The church (according to the Scriptures) is composed of individuals who have been obedient to the gospel’s plan of salvation (hear, believe, repent, confess Christ, and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins). However, the overwhelming majority of churches today teach different plans of salvation. Many teach the “Sinner’s Prayer,” faith only, sprinkling/pouring as acceptable methods of baptism, infant baptism, etc. Therefore, those who are involved in these denominations and follow these false plans of salvation simply cannot be part of Christ’s one true church – because they have not done what God commands for salvation! In addition, there is a pattern for local churches to follow (a blueprint that is revealed in the pages of the New Testament) – and there are very few churches that actually follow this pattern!

Summary

Certainly, there are many false ideas about the church. I am sure that these represent only a few of the false ideas that exist. I am also certain that additional points could be made about each of the things we’ve just discussed. However, my intention has simply been to draw some contrasts between these false ideas and the truth about the church that is taught in God’s word (as we will now begin to discuss).

How The Word Is Used

Now that we have discussed the importance of using the term “church” accurately and identified some common misconceptions about what the “church” is, let’s devote the rest of this lesson to allowing God’s word to instruct us concerning the proper applications of this word.

Some definitions

Before we consider the passages themselves, consider how a few Greek scholars define the Greek word “ekklesia.”

(1) *Thayer’s Greek Definitions*: “(1) a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly; 1a) an assembly of the people convened at the public place of council for the purpose of deliberating; 1b) the assembly of the Israelites; 1c) any gathering or throng of men assembled by chance, tumultuously; 1d) in the Christian sense.” [Thayer, Joseph Henry. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Published in 1886. Using: E-Sword. Version 10.2.1. Rick Myers. Copyright 2000-2013.]

(2) *Robertson’s Word Pictures* says that the word “ekklesia” originally meant assembly (Acts 19:39), but, also came to refer to an “unassembled assembly” (Acts 8:3) (see comments on Matthew 16:18). [Robertson, A.T. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Published in 1930-1933. Using: E-Sword. Version 10.2.1. Rick Myers. Copyright 2000-2013.]

(3) *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*: “...a calling out, that is, (concretely) a popular meeting, especially a religious congregation...assembly, church.” [*Strong’s Bible*

Dictionary. Published in 1890. Using: E-Sword. Version 10.2.1. Rick Myers. Copyright 2000-2013.]

(4) *Mounce's Expository Dictionary* says that "ekklesia" refers to the "'called-out ones' of God." Then, Mounce makes reference to the fact that the word had a secular use referring to a gathering, a Jewish use referring to the assembly of God's people in the Old Testament, and then a Christian use referring to disciples of Jesus Christ. [Mounce, W. (2006). *Mounce's complete expository dictionary of Old & New Testament words*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan.]

Each one of these definitions are useful to us in developing a better understanding of the word "church" (the Greek word "ekklesia"). However, again I assert that you do not need to be a Greek scholar or use Greek word study tools in order to understand the Bible. So, let's allow the Bible to be its own best commentary – and see how it uses the word "ekklesia."

A general assembly

In Acts chapter 19, Paul was preaching in the city of Ephesus. During this time, a man named Demetrius (a silversmith by trade, who made silver replicas of the temple of Diana and made great profit through this work) stirred up the people of Ephesus against Paul. He was telling the people that the temple of Diana would be despised and her magnificence would be destroyed through the teaching of the apostle. In response to the things being said by Demetrius (who was primarily motivated by greed), the Ephesians became full of wrath and "the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord" (v. 29).

In this context, notice verses 32, 39, and 41. Acts 19:32 says, "Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together." Acts 19:39 says, "But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly." And, Acts 19:41 says, "And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly."

Notice the word which is translated "assembly" in each one of these passages. This is the Greek word "ekklesia." Certainly, in this context, the word is not being used in a Christian sense in any way. Instead, it refers to a general assembly (a riot) of people in the city of Ephesus. So, we can conclude

that the word can be used to denote a general assembly of those who were not Christians.

The congregation of Israel

In Acts chapter 7, Stephen is preaching before a Jewish audience – giving a brief lesson in Jewish history and how Jewish people had routinely rejected God's ways. As he does so, consider the reference he makes in Acts 7:38: "This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us."

The word translated "congregation" in the NKJV is the Greek word "ekklesia." Here, it is clearly used in reference to the Israelite nation (the Jewish people) when they were in the wilderness, after being brought out of Egyptian slavery. Certainly, the context in which this word is used helps us to conclude that the word "ekklesia" is being used with reference to the collection of the Israelites.

The people of God

Though the Greek word can be used in the ways we have just observed (a general assembly and the assembly of the Jewish people), the word is most commonly used in the New Testament with reference to the people of God during the Christian/Gospel Age. The word is used frequently in the book of Acts and in the epistles which were written, but is only used twice in the gospels (in the book of Matthew). When the word is used in this sense, it is used with reference to the congregation of God/Christ. It does *not* refer to any building; but, to a group of people (Christians).

In 1 Corinthians 14, as Paul is dealing with the use of spiritual gifts, he instructs that these gifts be sought so that the church would be edified (or, spiritually built up in the faith). Notice 1 Corinthians 14:12: "Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel." Clearly, these spiritual gifts were not for the purpose of building up a physical building – but in building up the people of God in the most holy faith!

Also notice how Paul uses the word in Galatians 1:13: "For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it." Paul (then called Saul) had persecuted God's church and

had tried to destroy it! Notice that it was not just any assembly or group of people Paul had intended to bring harm upon; but, that it was God's church (His group of people) he wanted to destroy. I would also encourage you to read the Biblical record of this persecution in Acts 8:1-3 and Acts 9:1-2 – and consider that Paul was not attempting to destroy physical buildings; but, that he was interested in destroying the Christians who composed God's church!

Furthermore, as the definition offered by Mounce suggested, the word "ekklesia" is derived from two Greek words which mean "to call" and "out of." Certainly, the Scriptures would help us to understand that the church of God is composed of God's "called out ones." 1 Peter 2:9-10 says that Christians have been called out of darkness and into God's marvelous light! Therefore, God's church are people who have been separated from the sinful ways of darkness and are dedicated to accomplishing God's holy and righteous purposes!

An assembly of God's people

Specifically, the Greek word "ekklesia" can be used in the Scriptures to refer to God's people when they are assembled together. For instance, as Paul was giving instructions to the Corinthian church concerning their assemblies, consider what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: "Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church."

Certainly, Paul was not saying that Christian women were *always* forbidden to speak. Rather, Paul was giving particular instructions whenever the whole church assembled together. For instance, notice 1 Corinthians 14:23 and 26 to see this context: "Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?... 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."

Therefore, it was in these assemblies the women were commanded to keep silent. They were

not always forbidden to speak. Nor were they forbidden to speak in a particular building. But, in the "churches" (assemblies) that are identified in 1 Corinthians 14:23 and 26 – when the whole congregation would be assembled together. Note that we will talk more about the role of women in the assemblies of the church later in this series of lessons. For now, just appreciate the fact that the word can be used to denote the assemblies of God's people.

An unassembled assembly

Not only can the word "ekklesia" have reference to the people of God whenever they are assembled together in one place (as we saw in the previous point); but, it can have reference to the collection of God's people even when they are not assembled together. A.T. Robertson brought this to our attention whenever we considered his comments on Matthew 16:18.

Notice Acts 8:1-3 regarding Saul's persecution of the church to see this point: "Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison."

When this great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem, how was it that Saul persecuted the church? Verse 3 said that Saul made havoc of the church by entering every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. So, Saul persecuted the church by persecuting the individual members of the church. Notice that the congregation does not appear to have been assembled together when Saul was said to have persecuted the church. Still, they were collectively referred to as the church. That said, no one individual can properly be referenced as a church. Instead, each individual Christian is simply a member of the church, the body of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27)!

Used in a singular sense

One of only two uses of the term "ekklesia" in the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) is found in Matthew 16:18 – in the form of a promise

made by Jesus Christ. He said, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

This is a particularly significant passage regarding the church – as Jesus Christ promises that He would build His church. We will notice some more of the implications from this passage in our next lesson. For now, observe the fact that Jesus Christ only promised to establish one church. Notice that the word “church” is singular, not plural. That is, Jesus Christ would only establish one congregation of people. He would only be Head of “one body,” the church (see Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 4:4).

Though we will give greater attention to the “universal church” in a future lesson, recognize that Jesus is clearly making reference to a single group who would be His people. This is what I refer to whenever I use the term “universal church.” This is the totality of the saved who belong to Jesus Christ. Again, in reference to this “universal church,” the Bible refers to the “church” in a singular sense.

Used in a local sense

Finally, not only can this word be used in a broad sense, referring to all of God’s people collectively (the “universal church”); but, it can also be used in a local sense. When it is used in a “local” sense, it refers to a church in a local geographic area. Acts 11:22 references the “church in Jerusalem.” 1 Corinthians 1:2 references the “church of God which is at Corinth.” 1 Thessalonians 1:1 references the “church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” And, there are many other similar references to local churches in the Scriptures.

Therefore, when the word is used in this local sense, it is sometimes used in a plural sense. For instance, the word is used in reference to multiple churches in a local region. 1 Corinthians 16:19 references the “churches of Asia.” Galatians 1:2 addresses the book of Galatians to the “churches of Galatia.” Furthermore, Romans 16:16 references “churches of Christ” in a general sense without limitations of a specific region. Then, Romans 16:4 makes reference to the “churches of the Gentiles.”

Now, please understand that these passages do not discuss different denominations or indicate a hierarchical structure (like a Catholic diocese). Rather, these passages simply refer to different

congregations of Christians in local geographic areas. More attention will be given to a study of the local church in future lessons in this series.

Conclusion

After observing some of the ways in which this Greek word is used in the New Testament, you should be aware of one fact: You must look to the context of the passage in order to determine how the word is being used! You must allow the Bible to be its own best commentary!

Now that we have established this introductory information to the Bible subject of the church, it is my hope that we have established a firm foundation upon which we can build over the next seven lessons. Again, I encourage you to reflect upon the things we have studied and destroy any unbiblical ideas you may have about the church so that you can build your knowledge of the church only according to the teachings of God’s word!

Study Questions

What is the church of Christ?

What is the word “ekklesia”?

1. Why This Study Is Important

Do you have to be well-versed in the Greek language in order to be saved or to please God?

How will a study of this Greek word help you speak as the oracles of God?

How will a study of this Greek word help set the proper foundation for our study?

Discuss how the word is used in the following ways:

How will a study of this Greek word help you overcome misconceptions of the church?

2. Common Misconceptions About The Church

Briefly discuss each of the following misconceptions about the church:

1. An earthly organization –

2. A social club –

3. A political machine –

4. A building where religious people meet together –

5. Christ –

6. A group of denominations –

1. A general assembly –

2. The congregation of Israel –

3. The people of God –

4. An assembly of God's people –

5. An unassembled assembly –

6. Used in a singular sense –

7. Used in a local sense -

3. How The Word Is Used

Provide some definitions for the Greek word "ekklesia."

Lesson 2: The One True Church

There are many religious organizations in existence throughout the world today. Many of these religious organizations have claimed to be (or to be part of) the one true church you can read about in the pages of the Bible. It's no wonder, then, why there is so much religious confusion in this world!

Can we even identify the one true church today? Since this world has experienced so much religious division and confusion among those who call themselves "Christians," it is important to consider this question! It is my firm conviction that we *can* identify the one true church today by appealing to the Bible as the source of all authority on the matter! Colossians 3:17 instructs: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." So, if you can establish the characteristics of the church you read about in the New Testament, you will be able to identify the one true church today!

For instance, suppose that I needed help finding my dog. Suppose I told you that my dog is a Maltese-Shitzu mix, answers to the name "Simon," has a red collar, is mostly white with grey ears, and has a dog tag with the number 11448 (registered with Medina County, Ohio). Could you distinguish my dog from other dogs? If you found a basset hound, you could know that was not my dog. If you found a purebred Maltese, you could know that was not my dog. If you found a dog that was Maltese-Shitzu mix, had a red collar, was mostly white; but had brown ears with a number 17629 (registered with Monroe

County, Ohio), you could know that was not my dog. But, if you found a dog that is a Maltese-Shitzu mix, answers to the name "Simon," had a red collar, mostly white with grey ears, with a dog tag numbered 11448 (registered with Medina County, Ohio), you could know that you had found my dog!

It is the same way with finding the one true church you can read about in the pages of God's word! By studying the characteristics of the true church in the pages of the New Testament, you can understand how to be part of that church and how you can join yourself to a local church that is following only the New Testament pattern!

Now, one fallacy needs to be debunked as we begin this study. There are many different denominations and religious organizations that follow many different doctrines, submit to different heads, and practice different forms of "Christianity" – but, they all claim to be just another branch of the true Vine. They interpret Jesus' teaching in John 15:1-8 to mean that there are many different churches (branches) which compose the one Vine (Jesus Christ). According to this way of thinking, all of the thousands of various religious organizations are all part of Jesus' one true church – even though they practice different forms of "Christianity"! However, a study of John 15:1-8 reveals that whenever Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches" (vs. 5), He was talking about individual disciples – not about churches and religious organizations!

The purpose of this second lesson in our study of "The Church Of Christ" is to discover some identification markers of the one true church you can read about in the New Testament and encourage you to determine to be part of this one true church! Again, I ask that you open your heart and your Bible to allow God's word to teach you about the various identification markers of this church. Remember, that any modern-day religious organization which fails to meet these qualifications cannot be the one true church which belongs to Jesus Christ! Please note that many of these identification markers will be studied in greater detail in future lessons in this series.

Christ Promised To Build His Church

Before we consider specific identification markers of the one true church belonging to Jesus Christ, let's firmly establish that one exists – and that only one exists. If the New Testament teaches multiple churches as being in existence that practice various forms of Christianity then we need to examine each one of them. However, the Bible only teaches that one true church exists that belongs to Jesus Christ.

Christ only promised to build one church

As we discovered in lesson 1, the Greek word for “church” (“ekklesia”) is only used twice in the gospel records, during the life of Jesus Christ. In one of these instances, Jesus uses the word to foretell the church He would establish. Notice Matthew 16:18 very carefully: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Jesus promised Peter that He would build His church. Notice that it would be Jesus’ church (Jesus said it would be “My church”). Also notice that Jesus would do something to “build” His church. This would be accomplished by Jesus’ suffering, death, burial, and resurrection. Therefore, this church would be “purchased” with the blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28).

However, I want you to particularly notice the number of churches Jesus promised to build (or, establish through His sufferings, death, burial, and resurrection): One! Jesus promised to build His “church” – singular. Jesus did not promise that He would build His *churches* – plural. Therefore, there would only be one group of people who would belong to Jesus Christ and be His church!

Furthermore, Jesus continued to tell Peter in verse 19, “And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Notice how Jesus uses the terms “church” and “kingdom” interchangeably in these two verses. As we will see in a future lesson, Jesus’ church is His kingdom. For now, simply notice that Jesus would only be King over one “kingdom” – not many different *kingdoms*.

Only one church was established in New Testament times

Not only does the Bible teach that Jesus only promised to build/establish one church/kingdom; but, the Bible teaches that only one church was established during the New Testament times. Acts chapter 2 is the day upon which Jesus’ church came into existence. This can be demonstrated in a few ways (we’ll look at a couple more in a few moments). For now, please simply recognize the fact that only one church came into existence on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

In Acts 2, the gospel of Jesus Christ was first proclaimed to the people (as Jesus had now died, had been buried, had risen from the dead, and had ascended into Heaven). Now, as Peter (and the other apostles) preach Jesus Christ to those in Jerusalem on this occasion, notice what verse 41 states: “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.” Also notice verse 47: “praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

This is the first time in the Bible that Jesus’ church is referenced as being in existence! Now, let me acknowledge the fact that some Greek manuscripts (and some English translations) do not contain the phrase “the church” in Acts 2:47. However, whether it is directly stated or not, it is the implied subject! Jesus’ church came into existence on this day (as we will see in a future lesson in greater detail).

Still, there was only one church which came into existence at this time. In fact, all of the New Testament only tells of one church (also referred to as the body of Christ and the kingdom of Christ) being established! For instance, when the apostle Paul wrote Ephesians 4:4, he stated that there is “one body.” Now, earlier in the letter (in Ephesians 1:22-23), Paul stated that that the church is Jesus’ body (see also Colossians 1:18). So, there is only one church!

This is the only church that belongs to Jesus Christ!

Again, please note that Christ did not promise to build (establish) many different churches – and that many different churches were not established in Acts 2 (or anywhere else in the Scriptures). You can

search the entire Bible and never find a second church being established by Jesus Christ (or a promise for a second church which would belong to Him)!

From the end of Acts 2 and forward (through the rest of the New Testament), there is only one church in existence – Christ’s church! All of the religious confusion that would be caused by the presence of the thousands of different churches that exist today would come *after* the New Testament period. Realizing this fact, you should desire to be part of only that which we discover in the Scriptures concerning the one church of Jesus Christ!

The Church Of Christ Began In Jerusalem In Acts 2

As we begin searching the New Testament for identification markers of this one true church that belongs to Jesus Christ, we observe the fact that Jesus’ church began in Jerusalem in Acts 2.

In Acts 2 – approximately 33 A.D.

While we have briefly discussed this truth that Acts 2 marked the beginning point of Jesus’ church, I want us to consider this fact in greater detail. Consider verses 41 and 47 again. Acts 2:41 says, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.” Acts 2:47 says, “praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

It was approximately the year 33 A.D. that marked this very significant occasion. As you can see from the two passages in Acts 2, those who were being obedient to the gospel’s message that was preached were being added to the number of the disciples, forming Christ’s church! Some of the Greek manuscripts directly identify the “church” in verse 47. However, we can come to the same conclusion that these individuals were being added to the church by considering the fact that prior to Acts 2, the church is always referred to in the future tense (i.e. in Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, “I will build My church”); but, from Acts 2 and forward, the church is always referenced as being in existence!

In Jerusalem

The fact that the church was established in Acts 2 in the city of Jerusalem (where the events of Acts 2 took place) is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy concerning the origin of the church. Old Testament passages of Scripture pointed to Jerusalem as being the place in which Jesus’ kingdom would be established, which corresponded with the preaching of the New Covenant.

For instance, Isaiah 2:2-4 says, “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord’s house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.”

In addition, Jesus had told His apostles (prior to His ascension to Heaven) to “tarry in the city of Jerusalem” until they would be filled with the Holy Spirit and they would preach “repentance and remission of sins...beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-49). Again, Acts 2 marked the fulfillment of both these prophecies concerning the gospel and the church.

This is the only church that belongs to Jesus Christ!

There can be no question that the church of Christ began on this day in Acts 2 – in Jerusalem. In lesson 4, we will be exploring the establishment of Christ’s church in greater detail and considering the prophecies that were made concerning it.

However, many denominations and religious organizations will trace their beginnings to a later date than the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2! Additionally, many denominations and religious organizations will trace their origins back to some other location besides Jerusalem! These churches simply cannot be the same church that Jesus Christ established! So, if you want to be part of the one true

church Jesus established, make sure that it has its origins in Acts 2, in the city of Jerusalem!

The Church Of Christ Has No Human Head

As we continue searching the New Testament for identification markers of this one true church that belongs to Jesus Christ, we observe the fact that Jesus' church has no human head (earthly leader).

Christ is the only Head of His church

The Bible clearly identifies the fact that Jesus Christ is the Head of His church. Colossians 1:18 says, "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." The same point is made in Ephesians 1:22-23. He is the one who possesses all authority over His church (see Matthew 28:18). After all it is His body – and His kingdom!

Now, do not only appreciate the fact that Jesus Christ is the Head over His church; but, also appreciate the fact that He is the *only* Head over His church! There is no Bible passage that identifies any other head who has authority over this church. There is no authorization for any other organizational structure over the *universal* church (the totality of the saved). However, God has authorized for local congregations to be organized with elders, deacons, and saints (see Philippians 1:1). We'll talk more about the God-given organizational structure for the local church in a future lesson in this series. For now, recognize that it is authorized by God; but, these individuals do not possess any degree of authority over the *universal* church (only over the *local* church – and still do not possess more authority than Jesus Christ)!

There is no earthly governing body/head

There are many denominations and religious organizations today which have other types of governing powers. For instance, the Pope is the head of the Catholic Church and is seen as the infallible leader of every Catholic church. Other churches have presidents. Some have governing councils and conventions that meet every few years and amend

their church creed. The Jehovah's Witness organization has a governing body (the "WatchTower") overseeing all of the local "Kingdom Halls."

However, these types of organizational structures over churches are entirely without Bible authority. It may be seen as being wise or prudent by many individuals – as a good way to see that things are done properly; but, it is actually a perversion of the God-given organizational structure of the church!

This is the only church that belongs to Jesus Christ!

Christ's church (His Kingdom) recognizes Jesus Christ as the only Head/King – and submits only to Him. No man, woman, or group of individuals are elevated to this position that only Jesus Christ occupies!

Whenever a church begins to submit itself to human heads, not only has the God-given pattern regarding the organizational structure of the church been perverted; but, other false doctrines and religious practices are sure to follow – because mankind is fallible (even the Pope!). Only God is infallible – and only Jesus provides perfect leadership for His church! Therefore, if you want to be part of Jesus' one true church, make sure that the church does not teach you to submit to any *universal* governing authority besides Jesus Christ!

The Church Of Christ Follows The Doctrine Of Christ

As we continue searching the New Testament for identification markers of this one true church that belongs to Jesus Christ, we observe the fact that Jesus' church follows the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

Christ's church only follows the doctrine of Christ

Jesus' one true church understands that there is no other gospel than that which has been revealed from God. His one true church recognizes that God forbids the teaching or pursuit of any other gospel besides the one gospel He revealed in the pages of the New Testament. Jesus' one true church

recognizes that any other gospel that is preached must be rejected – no matter who teaches it, recognizing that there are serious consequences for perverting the doctrine of Christ (see Galatians 1:6-9)!

Consider 2 John 1:9-11: “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.” Only the true doctrine of Christ revealed in the New Testament results in fellowship with God! All other doctrines fail to lead to God!

Christ’s church has no creed books

For Jesus’ one true church, the Bible is the only book of doctrine! Everything that is done by Jesus’ one true church must be according to the teaching of the New Testament (by the authority of Jesus Christ, see Colossians 3:17). There are simply no other books of doctrine that are held alongside or above the Bible by Jesus’ one true church!

Not only does Galatians 1:6-9 forbid holding to any other gospel besides the one gospel revealed by God; but, Revelation 22:18-19 issues a serious warning for changing any of God’s instructions (specifically applicable to the things written in the book of Revelation; but, generally applicable to all of God’s words in the Bible): “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” So, if a book of doctrine says more than the Bible says, it says too much. And, if a book of doctrine says less than the Bible says, it says too little!

This is the only church that belongs to Jesus Christ!

Jesus Christ’s church holds to His doctrine – and only to His doctrine! 2 Timothy 1:13 instructs us to hold fast to the pattern of sound words! Christ’s church recognizes that it is through the pages of God’s word (specifically, the New Testament) that

God instructs His people today – and will fully submit themselves to the things written therein!

Christ’s one true church does not hold to the doctrines, opinions, or traditions of mankind above the teachings of God’s word. By holding to the doctrines and traditions of man, many have worshiped God in vain (see Matthew 15:1-20)! Many religious organizations today have standard church manuals and books of doctrine (i.e. the Methodist Discipline). Therefore, if you want to be part of Christ’s one true church, make sure you are part of the church that only submits to the teachings of God’s word!

The Church Of Christ Is Composed Of Those Who Have Obeyed His Doctrine

As we continue searching the New Testament for identification markers of this one true church that belongs to Jesus Christ, we observe the fact that Jesus’ church is composed of those who have obeyed His doctrine.

Christ taught the need to obey Him

Look at what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21-23: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

So, those who would be saved would be those who would obey God; not just profess Christ as Lord and believe in Him! Similarly, in John 14:15, Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” Truly loving Jesus, then, is not merely professing our allegiance to Him; but, demonstrating our faith and love by keeping His commandments! Surely, those who are Christ’s people (His church) will be dedicated to obeying His commandments!

The gospel's plan of salvation

Since those who are in Christ's church have been obedient to God's instructions, consider the plan of salvation they have been obedient to. Please note that these are the "terms of admission" into Christ's church. Repeatedly in the New Testament (particularly in the book of Acts), we can see that these are the requirements God has placed upon individuals in order to be forgiven of their sins and be added to Christ's church.

If you are unfamiliar with this plan of salvation, take some time to read these passages. We will discuss this in greater detail in a future study. To become a Christian, you must: (1) Hear God's word (Romans 10:17; Acts 18:8), (2) believe (John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6), (3) repent of your sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30), (4) confess Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37), and (5) be immersed (baptized) in water for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16). Upon being obedient to this plan of salvation, individuals were added by the Lord to the church (see Acts 2:36-47). Then, those who were members of Jesus' church were expected to be faithful until death (Revelation 2:10).

This is the only church that belongs to Jesus Christ!

Those who are part of Christ's church have been obedient to Him! Those who have sinned against Him must be obedient to His plan of salvation in order to become a Christian and be added by Him to His church!

Unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of (so-called) "Christian" churches today do not teach the plan of salvation that is taught in the New Testament. Instead, they often teach salvation by faith only, a "Sinner's Prayer," infant baptism, sprinkling/pouring for baptism, or any number of false doctrines. Yet, following these man-made "plans of salvation" does not lead to admission into Christ's church! These "plans of salvation" may be sufficient for entering the churches of men; but, not for entering the church of Christ! In fact, these "plans of salvation" do not really lead to salvation – they only make false promises! Therefore, if you want to be part of the one true church, you must find the church that accurately teaches and follows this plan of salvation!

The Church Of Christ Is Locally Organized

As we continue searching the New Testament for identification markers of this one true church that belongs to Jesus Christ, we observe the fact that Jesus' church is locally organized.

Local churches existed in New Testament times

As we briefly discussed in lesson 1 (and we will talk about further in a future lesson), there are many times that you read about "churches" (plural) in the New Testament. For instance, Romans 16:16 says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you."

However, the plural use of the word "church" denotes local churches/congregations that belong to Jesus Christ. For instance, Galatians 1:2 identifies the "churches of Galatia." 1 Corinthians 16:19 identifies the "churches of Asia." Romans 16:4 identifies the "churches of the Gentiles." These were local churches which were composed of Christians (who had been obedient to the gospel's plan of salvation we just studied about) who had joined themselves together to work and worship in a local geographic area. Therefore, it is fully according to God's plan for God's people to be locally organized according to the Scriptural pattern!

These local churches are not different denominations

Local churches do *not* constitute different denominations. That is, the churches of Asia and Galatia we just read about were not the equivalent to the local Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, and Lutheran churches in our communities today! In fact, when you engage in an in-depth study of the local church you will find that local churches of Christ are composed of those who have obeyed the gospel's plan of salvation – and the churches are expected to hold fast to the pattern revealed by God. For instance, Saul attempted to join himself to the disciples (the church) in Jerusalem after he had obeyed the gospel and become a Christian (see Acts 9; especially verse 26). Then, consider Revelation 2-3 to discover how that Jesus rebukes congregations that were not living according to His instructions!

Given this information, it is proper to conclude that most of the local churches today simply cannot be part of Christ's one true church because they do not teach or follow God's plan of salvation and they do not follow the God-given pattern! In addition, passages like John 17:20-23, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:1-6, and Philippians 1:27 identify the responsibility for God's church to be united – and not divided. However, most churches today are divided from one another because they are practicing different kinds of “Christianity.”

This is the only church that belongs to Jesus Christ!

God has fully authorized for His people to be locally organized. In fact, the Scriptures give plenty of evidence that it is God's desire for His people to be joined together in local churches. The local church is a base of fellowship and strength that is greater than any one individual Christian – and God wants His people to be strengthened in their shared faith (see Romans 1:12)!

Still, as we will see in just a moment, there is a pattern for local churches to follow – and God does not approve of Christians joining themselves to just any local church. As we have seen, most local churches today fail to properly teach and follow the instructions of God concerning salvation – and most fail to follow the New Testament pattern in all areas! Therefore, as you strive to be part of the one true church that belongs to Jesus, recognize that it is locally organized.

Local Churches Of Christ Follow The New Testament Pattern

As we continue searching the New Testament for identification markers of this one true church that belongs to Jesus Christ, we observe the fact that Jesus' church is locally organized – and each local church must follow the New Testament pattern.

There is a pattern in the New Testament

Listen to Paul's language in 2 Timothy 1:13: “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you

have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” Paul said that there was a pattern of sound (uncorrupt, healthy) words those who are Christians must cling to. Specifically, this pattern is the pattern of sound words revealed within the pages of the New Testament (the law we are under today).

Therefore, there is a pattern of doctrine, a pattern about salvation, a pattern for Christian living, etc. within the New Testament. Additionally, there is a pattern concerning local churches of Christ contained within the New Testament!

A pattern for local churches to follow

During New Testament times, local churches were given instructions concerning their worship, their work, and their organizational structures. Furthermore, we also have a series of examples concerning local churches which had God's approval and local churches which did not have God's approval. There are also forced conclusions to be observed in these areas as well. Altogether, this forms a pattern for local churches today – to know what God wants from each local congregation.

While we will consider each one of these three areas in greater detail later in this study, observe the pattern given for local churches to follow concerning their organizational structure, their collective work, and their collective worship. There is a pattern for the organizational structure of the local church that involves elders, deacons, and saints. There is a pattern for the collective work of the local church that involves evangelism, edification, and limited benevolence. And, there is a pattern for the collective worship of the local church that involves teaching, praying, singing, taking the Lord's Supper, and taking up the collection. Local churches must not stray from this pattern!

This is the only church that belongs to Jesus Christ!

Faithful churches of Christ will adhere to this pattern of sound words contained within the New Testament. The only way for a congregation to be pleasing to God is for it to be following God's instructions – and not stray from them.

Sadly, there are many local churches (even many local churches wearing the name “church of Christ”) that do not follow this pattern. Therefore, if you are seeking to be part of the one true church that

belongs to Jesus Christ, make sure the local church you associate with is following the New Testament pattern for local churches (we'll discuss this pattern in greater detail in later lessons).

The Church Of Christ Is Called By His Name

As we continue searching the New Testament for identification markers of this one true church that belongs to Jesus Christ, we observe the fact that Jesus' church is called by His name.

The church belongs to Christ

Think back to what we established from Matthew 16:18. Jesus said, "I will build My church." I emphasized earlier in this lesson that Jesus is showing possession over the church. It is His.

Why is it Jesus' church? As I mentioned earlier, He is the one who suffered and died to redeem the people from their sins! Acts 20:28 says that the church of God was "purchased with His own blood." 1 Peter 1:18-19 says that Christians were "not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold...but with the precious blood of Christ." Therefore, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says that those who are Christians are not their own; but, are to be dedicated to glorifying God in their bodies and spirits – which are God's!

The church wears Christ's name

Individually, those who are true followers of Jesus Christ are identified as being "Christians" in the New Testament. Acts 11:26 says "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."

Then, not only were individual Christians called by Christ's name; but, local churches also wore the name of Jesus. Romans 16:16 identifies local churches as "churches of Christ." These were local churches composed of people who belonged to Jesus Christ. Similarly, you read about churches of God (see 1 Corinthians 1:2). However, this is not a different church. Instead, since Jesus is God (John 1:1), this is just another way of saying the same thing (see Acts 20:28)!

This is the only church that belongs to Jesus Christ!

While there are many who claim that the name of the church does not matter, you should observe its use in the Scriptures. Therefore, if we want to "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11), we must be devoted to calling Bible things by Bible names.

Clearly, the church is identified as the church of Christ in the Scriptures. He built it. He died for it. It is His – and no one else's! Therefore, it is a great tragedy to see churches and professing "Christians" calling themselves by other names (i.e. Lutherans, Methodists, Catholics, Baptists, etc.)! If you want to be part of Christ's one true church, make sure that you are only wearing His name!

The Church Of Christ Will Be Saved Eternally

Finally, as we continue searching the New Testament for identification markers of this one true church that belongs to Jesus Christ, we observe the fact that Jesus' church will be saved eternally.

The promises of the gospel

Ultimately, why does it matter whether you are part of Christ's one true church or not? Simply because of the promises made in the gospel! First, the gospel promises that those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ will be punished with everlasting destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Second, the gospel promises that those who are obedient to God will live eternally with God in Heaven! Read John 14:1-6, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, and 1 Peter 1:3-12 to see some references to this promise.

Additionally, Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Hebrews 5:9 says that Jesus Christ is the "author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." Revelation 22:14 says that those who "do His commandments" will have the "right to the tree of life" and "enter through the gates" into the Heavenly city.

The home prepared for Christ's church

Jesus Christ promised that He will come again – and He will get His bride (the church). He will take the church and give all the church eternal life in Heaven with the Father! Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 and see how those who are Christians will always be with the Lord whenever He returns!

Read Revelation 21:1-22:5 to see the home that Jesus Christ is preparing for His church. See how this place is free from all pain, suffering, evil, sorrow, and death. And, see how this place will grant its residents complete fellowship with God for all of eternity!

This is the only church that belongs to Jesus Christ!

Jesus' church will be saved for all of eternity! And, *only* Jesus' church will be given this eternal home in Heaven! For, only Jesus' church will have done that which God has commanded for salvation and been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ!

While the churches of men make promises for this same salvation in Heaven, the churches of men will never partake of this promise! Only Jesus' church will be given eternal life in Heaven. Those who fail to obey God will be punished with everlasting destruction (see 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 and Revelation 21:8). Therefore, you must make absolutely certain that you are part of Jesus' one true church – because only His church will be saved!

Conclusion

This is the only church that belongs to Jesus Christ! There are many imposter churches. Many churches practice something they call "Christianity" and profess to believe in and follow Jesus Christ. However, we have observed some of the identification markers of Jesus' one true church.

Now, you must use these identification markers (and the things we will continue to discuss through this study) to help you find Jesus' one true church so that you can be part of it! Do not settle for any substitute! Remember, God does not accept changes to His instructions (see Galatians 1:6-9 and Revelation 22:18-19)!

Study Questions

Can you identify the one true church today? Explain your answer.

Are all denominations part of this one true church? Explain your answer.

1. Christ Promised To Build His Church

How many churches did Jesus promise to build?

How many churches were established in NT times?

2. The Church Of Christ Began In Jerusalem In Acts 2

When did the church of Christ come into existence?

Where did the church of Christ begin?

3. The Church Of Christ Has No Human Head

Who is the Head of Christ's church?

Is there an earthly governing body/head of the church of Christ?

4. The Church Of Christ Follows The Doctrine Of Christ

Does the church of Christ preach any other doctrine besides the doctrine of Christ?

Does the church of Christ have any other creed books?

5. The Church Of Christ Is Composed Of Those Who Have Obeyed His Doctrine

Did Jesus teach the necessity of obedience? Explain.

How do individuals enter the church of Christ?

6. The Church Of Christ Is Locally Organized

Did local churches of Christ exist in NT times?

Were these local churches of Christ different denominations?

7. Local Churches Of Christ Follow The NT Pattern

Is there a pattern in the NT?

Is there a NT pattern for local churches of Christ to follow?

8. The Church Of Christ Is Called By His Name

Who does the church of Christ belong to?

What name did local churches of Christ and disciples of Christ wear?

9. The Church Of Christ Will Be Saved Eternally

What are the promises of the Gospel?

What is the home prepared for the church of Christ?

***Is this the only church that belongs to Christ? Explain your answer.**

Lesson 3: The Names And Descriptions Of The Church

There are thousands of different religious organizations today – with thousands of different names. Each of these different names serve to differentiate one group from the others. There are churches which call themselves “Catholic,” “Baptist,” “Methodist,” “Presbyterian,” “Lutheran,” “Pentecostal,” “Apostolic,” “Nazarene,” and many, many other titles.

Perhaps there is not much thought as to the Bible authority involved in how we designate a church in today’s society. However, a name actually says a lot about the congregation! Each of the names I just listed identifies those churches with particular doctrinal beliefs and religious practices. And, each one of those names suggest that those religious organizations are unconcerned with selecting a name that can be found in the pages of the New Testament.

However, if we are interested in being part of the church you can read about in the pages of the New Testament (Jesus’ one true church), shouldn’t we be interested in being called by a name God approves? Consider the following example of restoration from the Old Testament, in Genesis 26:17-18: “Then Isaac departed from there and

pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them.”

Now, Isaac could have dug different wells in different places and called them by different names. However, he was interested in digging “again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father.” He wanted to restore those wells. And, in order to truly restore the original wells, he needed to call “them by the names which his father had called them.”

The same thing is true concerning the church today. If we are interested in being part of the church you can read about in the Bible, we should be interested in doing all things according to the authority of Jesus Christ! Colossians 3:17 says, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” And, if we are interested in doing *everything* by the authority of Jesus Christ, this must include calling the church only by names which are used for the church in the Bible!

Therefore, the purpose of this lesson is to consider the value of a name and to consider the names and descriptions used in the Bible to identify God’s one true church!

Is There Anything In A Name?

Does it matter how a church identifies itself? Isn’t it “just a name”? Many people consider the name of a church as a matter to be decided by its members and as being largely unimportant to God. Many would borrow a line from the pen of William Shakespeare and argue that a rose would smell just as sweet if it were called by any other name, arguing that there is nothing in a name.

So, as we observe that this indifferent mindset toward the name of God’s church is prevalent in our culture, let’s meet this challenge head-on by considering whether or not there is anything in a name – both from physical and spiritual perspectives?

The name of a child

Is there anything in a name? Whenever you consider a name for your soon-to-be-born child, do you carelessly select a name at random? Or, do you attempt to pick out just the “right” one? Are you indifferent about how your son or daughter will be identified throughout his/her earthly life?

Perhaps you select the name of a beloved relative, a faithful Bible character, a famous individual, or just a name that you like. Consider this: Would you name your child after your greatest enemy? Would you name your child after a wicked individual (i.e. Adolf, Jezebel, Saddam, Osama, etc.)? Would you name your male child Susan or your female child Greg? If not, why not?

There is something in a name! Every reasonable person who cares about how his/her children will be identified throughout his/her life will give consideration to the name he/she gives his/her children!

The name of a business

Is there anything in a name? Whenever a business owner prepares to open a business, the name is very carefully selected. The business owner recognizes the significance of the name – because this will be the way his/her business is identified as long as the business is operational! In addition, not only do business recognize the importance of choosing the right name; but, they also recognize the importance of maintaining a good name. Many large companies even hire individuals to work in the field of public relations in order to manage the name/brand of the company and keep the right things associated with its name!

As an illustration, on October 3, 2014, the *New York Post* had an article entitled, “‘Isis’ businesses fighting bad image, unlucky name association” [Press, A. (n.d.). ‘Isis’ businesses fighting bad image, unlucky name association. Retrieved March 25, 2015, from <http://nypost.com/2014/10/03/isis-businesses-fighting-bad-image-unlucky-name-association/>].

“ISIS” is the now popular identification of the terrorist group (also called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), known for its brutal beheadings and persecutions of those who refuse to follow Islam. However, whenever ISIS rose to a place of influence and became a known organization to people in the

United States, there were already several businesses using the name “ISIS.” For instance, the story details an Isis Bridal and Formal shop, Isis Collections, Inc., and Isis Wallet. For these business owners, the unfortunate and coincidental connection between their names and the terrorist group has caused major headaches and damage to their brand images.

There is something in a name! This is just one specific example of the value of a name in business. Many other examples could be provided. Still, every reasonable business owner accepts the fact that there is something in the name of his/her company!

The name of your spouse

Is there anything in a name? Whenever a man marries a woman, does he care what name she chooses to wear? After they marry and she files the necessary paperwork involved to change her last name, does he care what name she chooses?

If there is truly nothing in a name, then it does not matter what last name a man’s wife chooses to wear. She could choose to wear the last name of her favorite movie actor. She could choose the last name of an ex-boyfriend. Or, she could simply choose a name at random or choose to keep her maiden name. Would a husband be happy with any of these decisions? If not, why not?

There is something in a name! Whenever a wife takes on her husband’s name, she demonstrates that she has been united with her husband – that she is *his* wife (and no one else’s wife)!

Name is important!

Clearly, these examples demonstrate that there is something important in a name *physically!* Now, as we focus on the names and descriptions God has used in the New Testament regarding His church, it is important to understand that this discussion is *more* than just a discussion about what appears on the sign! This is a discussion about how a church identifies itself – and is identified by others! Consider some important factors in the name of the church (and local churches).

(1) It is important to speak as the oracles of God. If the Bible calls the church one thing, and we call it something different, we are not speaking as God speaks! Consider 1 Peter 4:11 concerning the importance of speaking as God speaks: “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone

ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

We must be careful (as we seek to do everything by the authority of Jesus Christ, Colossians 3:17) that we are calling Bible things by Bible names. There are many who are guilty (as we discussed in lesson 1) of using Bible terms in ways the Bible does not use them (i.e. “Christian,” “baptism,” “church”). In the same way, we should desire to identify the one true church that belongs to Jesus Christ in the way God identifies the church in the pages of the New Testament! If not, why not?

(2) It is important because it denotes ownership. As we will discuss momentarily, the church is identified in the New Testament as being the church of God and the church of Christ. These terms denote ownership. You could just as easily call the church God’s church and Christ’s church. The Scriptures plainly demonstrate that Christ owns the church because He purchased it with His own blood!

So, if the terms used in the Bible to identify the church denote Christ as the owner of it – why should we use terms that are foreign to the Bible or that designate the church as belonging to someone else?

(3) It is important because it identifies. One of the fundamental facts about a name is that it identifies. My name is Eric Michael Krieg. Everything I am is identified by that name. That is how I am known to others. Now, some things are identified by common names and some things are identified by proper names. Eric Michael Krieg is a proper name. However, many things are also identified by common names. For instance, the natural satellite God placed in the Earth’s orbit to reflect the light from the sun and provide light for the earth at night is identified as the “moon.”

Furthermore, in Genesis 2:18-20 we are told that God gave Adam the responsibility of naming all of the animals God had just created. “And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name.” Now, he surely did not give them each a proper name (i.e. John, Betty, Donald, Sarah, etc.). Instead, he gave them common names (i.e. cow, fox, lion, etc.). These animals would be identified by these common names!

In the same way, God identifies His church in certain ways. Now, as we will see, He did not give just one proper name for the church to always be identified by. Instead, He identified the church by several different common names. Yet, even still, the specific terms God has selected for His church identifies what it is and what it stands for! For instance, the name “church of Christ” *should* indicate that the church holds to the pattern of sound words contained within the Holy Scriptures (see 2 Timothy 1:13). This is just as true as the name “Baptist Church” identifies some things that church believes and practices (i.e. baptism *after* salvation, baptism by immersion in water, etc.).

(4) It is important because it distinguishes. Since the name of the church identifies, it also distinguishes. Now, in Bible times, God’s church was the only church in existence. Still, the individuals who were part of “the Way” were distinguished as being separate from other things. They were separate from the world, they were separate from idolaters, they were separate from Judaism, etc. They were truly the people God had called out of darkness and into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9-10)! Therefore, those individuals who identified themselves as “Christians,” as following “the Way,” as members of the “household of God,” and part of the “church of Christ” would be identified as being different from all others (and would often be persecuted accordingly, see Acts 9:1-2).

In the same way, using Biblical designations for the church not only identifies certain things about a church’s beliefs and practices; but, it also distinguishes a church from the others in existence today! Therefore, it helps those who are looking to practice New Testament Christianity find other churches of Christ to worship and work with – instead of joining a Baptist church, Lutheran church, Pentecostal church, Catholic church, etc.!

Name is not the only important factor

While we can observe these facts about the importance of the terms used to identify the church, I also want to emphasize that the name is *not* the only important factor! As we continue to go through this study, then, please recognize that this is only one part of restoring the church of the New Testament. If a church wants to please God, it will identify itself in a Biblically-approved way. However, there are many churches today that wear Biblically-approved names,

but stray from the Bible pattern in other areas (i.e. the God-given work of the church)! These churches are not acceptable to God just because of their Biblical names!

In addition, let me make it clear that we are not just discussing what name a church chooses to place outside of its meeting location. We are talking about how a church identifies itself! Again, if a church wants to do all things by the authority of Jesus Christ, it will desire to use a Biblical name; but, it will not *just* be focused on using a Biblical name!

Names Used In Scripture

Now that we have seen the importance of using the proper terms to identify God's one true church, let's consider how the church is identified in the Bible. As we consider these things, please realize that the church is not just given one proper name; but, there are actually many different terms used in Scripture to identify Christ's church. Let's begin to consider them here – and then we will consider some other terms used interchangeably for the church later.

The church

There are many general references that are made in the Scriptures to groups of Christians by simply identifying them as “the church” or the “church” in/at/of.... Consider the following references to see this point.

(1) Acts 8:1-3: “Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” Here is a reference to the “church which was at Jerusalem.”

(2) Acts 11:22: “Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.” Here is another reference to the “church in Jerusalem.”

(3) 1 Corinthians 16:19: “The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you

heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.” Here is a reference to multiple local churches. These were identified as the “churches of Asia.”

(4) Galatians 1:2: “and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia.” This is another reference to multiple local churches in a specific geographic area. This time, the reference is to the “churches of Galatia.”

(5) Colossians 4:16: “Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.” This passage instructs the church in Colossae to share epistles with the “church of the Laodiceans.”

(6) 1 Thessalonians 1:1: “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul addresses this letter to the “church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

(7) Romans 16:4: “who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.” Paul gives thanks for Aquila and Priscilla (two Christians) in this text, also stating that the “churches of the Gentiles” give thanks for them as well.

(8) Hebrews 12:23: “to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect.” This passage references the church as the “church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven.”

Now, consider all of these references. Each one of these references tell us something about those who composed the church. Many times, they told us about their whereabouts (i.e. Laodicea, Asia, Galatia, Thessalonica, etc.). Romans 16:4 informed us about their nationality (the “churches of the Gentiles”). 1 Thessalonians 1:1 identified the church in Thessalonica as being composed of individuals who were in God and Jesus. Then, Hebrews 12:23 identifies God's church as being composed of individuals who have a favored status in God's sight (like firstborn children), who are registered in Heaven.

Therefore, all of these passages demonstrate the common use of identifying a church by who

composes the church. This was commonplace in the New Testament and is fully authorized today. While the passages we've just considered say something about those who were in the churches, they all were churches of God/Christ! The churches we've just considered were *not* separate denominations. They would not have rejected the name of Jesus Christ or claimed another as the owner/builder of the church (as long as they were faithful congregations)! They would have embraced the same doctrines and religious practices that are enumerated throughout the pages of the New Testament (although some churches fell out of favor with God, i.e. the churches of Galatia).

The church of God/Christ

Within the New Testament, you can also clearly see the use of the names "church of God" and "church of Christ" in reference to this one true church. While the passages in the previous point focused on who composed those churches, the passages we are now about to consider focus on the Owner of the church! Now, again, these are not different denominations. Instead, these terms are used interchangeably with reference to those who are Christians.

(1) The church of God. Consider 1 Corinthians 1:2: "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." As the apostle Paul introduces his letter to this congregation of Christians in the city of Corinth, he identifies them as "the church of God which is at Corinth." Notice also that this designation as the "church of God" is applicable to any group of people who are "sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" and "call on the name of Jesus Christ," the Lord!

Now, what does it mean to call a group of Christians the "church of God"? Consider Acts 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." In this passage, Paul was speaking with the elders of the Ephesian congregation, encouraging them to be good shepherds/elders of God's church! He tells them to shepherd the "church of God which He purchased with His own blood." So, to be the "church of God"

refers to the fact that Jesus Christ shed His blood in order to redeem those who would obey Him from their sins. Therefore, this identification/name of the church designates ownership! No one else has purchased the church with their blood and redeemed it from sin. Only Jesus has done this!

Do not become confused by the name "church of God" as it is used in these two passages – and then by the name "church of Christ" (as we'll see momentarily). The two are equal. Remember, Jesus Christ is God. John 1:1 says that Jesus Christ (the Word) "is God." He is the one who shed His blood to redeem mankind from His sin (compare 1 Peter 1:18-19 and Acts 20:28). So, these are not two different churches, but simply both references to Jesus' church!

(2) The church of Christ. Romans 16:16 says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you." As Paul concludes his letter to the Romans, he includes a number of specific greetings to the Christians in Rome. Now, in verse 16, Paul extends greetings to the Romans from other "churches of Christ."

Now, consider that if multiple churches could be identified as "churches of Christ," then a single church would have been a "church of Christ." If not, why not? Again, as we discussed regarding the church of God, Jesus Christ is the owner/possessor of the church. Remember that it was Jesus Christ who said: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

It would be Jesus' church because He would build/establish it. He would do this through His death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. He would fulfill all of the Old Testament prophecies and usher in His kingdom/church by offering the forgiveness of sins through obedience to God's commandments!

Summary

In both of these references, we see the identification of the Owner of these churches as Jesus Christ/God! Therefore, just as we saw in 1 Thessalonians 1:1, even general references in the previous section would also be references to churches of God/Christ. Again, 1 Thessalonians 1:1 identified the "church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Again, I want to state that the terms “church of God” and “church of Christ” are *not* given as exclusive proper names of the church. However, they are clearly among the ways in which the New Testament identifies God’s church. In addition, they are clearly important identification terms that designate the ownership of those congregations as belonging to Jesus Christ!

Descriptions Of The Church

In addition to the names of the church that we have just been studying, the church is also identified by many other terms. This point is really an extension of the previous one. These are also not proper names used to exclusively identify the church. Instead, they work together with the others we have considered to properly identify God’s one true church. Each one of these terms identifies some additional aspect about the church you can read about in the Bible.

The kingdom of God/Christ

The church is identified as a kingdom (as a group of ruled people). Specifically, the church is identified as being a people who are ruled by God and by Jesus Christ! The Old Testament foretold the coming of God’s eternal kingdom in passages such as Daniel 2:44: “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”

The church is the fulfillment of such prophecies as this. Specifically, the passage in Daniel prophesied that God’s eternal kingdom would be established during the reign of the Roman Empire (as seen in the vision of the statue). Indeed, during the days of the Roman Empire, the kingdom of God was announced to have been “at hand” (Matthew 3:1-2). Furthermore, during these days, Jesus said that the kingdom would be established during the lives of many who lived on earth at that time. Mark 9:1 says, “And He said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.’”

That the church is this kingdom can plainly be seen from a study of the Scriptures. The kingdom

of God is not an earthly kingdom yet to be established. Instead, it is a spiritual kingdom composed of Christians. Notice how Jesus uses the terms “church” and “kingdom” interchangeably in Matthew 16:18-19: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Furthermore, notice Colossians 1:13 and observe that, by the time this passage was written, the kingdom was in existence: “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” It makes perfect sense for the “kingdom” to be identified as being in existence in this passage – because Christ’s church was already in existence!

Now, as you consider the designation of the church as the kingdom of God/Christ in the Scriptures, this should help you understand that Jesus Christ is King. He has all authority. Furthermore, this is a spiritual (not a physical) kingdom which is composed of all those who are Christians. To be part of this kingdom, then, necessitates that you submit your life to Jesus as King – and you will receive all of the spiritual blessings that come from being part of His kingdom!

The body of Christ

Another common way the church is identified in the Bible is as the “body of Christ.” Consider a few passages.

Colossians 1:18: “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

Ephesians 1:22-23: “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.”

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

All of these passages demonstrate that those who are Christians and part of the one true church of Christ are part of the body of Christ! No one individual Christian is the body; but, each Christian is a member of the body (just as you have only one body, but many members of your body). Each

member of the body, then, contributes to the body in a unique and special way. However, each Christian and the church (collectively) must submit to the one true Head of the body, which is Jesus Christ!

So, the identification of the church as the body of Christ helps us to understand the place of each Christian – in reference to the church and to Christ. In reference to the church, each Christian is an important contributor and must supply his/her own share (see Ephesians 4:11-16). In reference to Christ, each Christian and the church (collectively) must submit to His leadership and authority (just as the members of your physical body submit to the leadership of your head). Furthermore, the Bible is clear that there is only “one body” (see Ephesians 4:4).

The household of God

Next, the term “household of God” is used in Scripture to identify God’s church. Consider the following passages.

1 Timothy 3:15: “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.”

Ephesians 2:19: “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”

Both of these passages emphasize the fact that those who compose God’s church are part of the family of God. Each Christian is a child of God and a joint heir of God with Jesus Christ (see Romans 8:14-17). Therefore, the Lord Jesus is “not ashamed” to call them His “brethren” (Hebrews 2:11). In addition, this way of identifying the church helps us to understand how and why members of the church are commonly referred to as being brothers and sisters.

The temple of God

Those who are in the body of Jesus Christ and are purposefully dedicated to honoring Christ Jesus as King are also identified as being the “temple of God.” Consider the following verses.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of

God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”

Ephesians 2:19-22: “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

These dedicated followers of Jesus Christ compose a spiritual house made of living stones and a royal priesthood (see 1 Peter 2:4-10) to be used in the service and worship of God (like the temple was in the Old Testament). Actually, the Scriptures present both the church (collectively) and Christians (individually) as being the temple of God. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 appears to have the church (collectively) as its subject, while 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 appears to have individual Christians as its subject. However, the point is the same for both.

Those who are Christians (both individually and collectively) constitute a “dwelling place of God in the Spirit” as God directs His people through the word which the Spirit revealed! In addition, just as the temple was to be a holy place because of the presence of God, the church must also be holy (see 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 and 1 Peter 1:15-16).

The bride of Christ

Finally, we can find that the Scriptures identify the church as being the bride of Jesus Christ. Consider the following.

2 Corinthians 11:2: “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

Romans 7:4: “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another — to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.”

Revelation 19:6-9: “And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him

glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!”’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true sayings of God.’”

Ephesians 5:22-33 goes on to explain the responsibilities that husbands and wives have toward one another – and explains these responsibilities by referencing this relationship between Christ and His church. Paul says that the “husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:23-24).

This identification of Christ’s church, then, helps us to understand the church’s submissive role to Christ – as well as Christ’s great love for us. Christ has loved His church so much that He gave His life for her – so that she could be saved from her sins. Furthermore, the church must recognize Christ as being its Head and be fully submissive to Christ’s teachings. He expects His bride to be faithful to Him throughout their lives (Revelation 2:10) – just as a husband expects his wife to be faithful throughout their lives!

Other descriptive terms

There are other terms used in the Scriptures in addition to these in reference to God’s people. For instance, those who were followers of Jesus were identified as being of “the Way” (see Acts 9:1-2; Acts 19:9; Acts 24:22). This reference ties into Jesus’ claim to be the Way (John 14:6).

1 Peter 2:9-10 is also full of descriptive terms for those who are Christians: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.” While this reference is to Christians and is not being directly written to a specific church, you can still gain some great insight about how God references His people.

You are encouraged to make a diligent search of the Scriptures to discover all of the terms that are used with reference to God’s people (both individually and collectively). Then, you must make

certain that you are accurately handling God’s word and making the proper applications of the passages (see 2 Timothy 2:15) so that you can call Bible things by Bible names and speak as the oracles of God!

Conclusion

Christ’s church wears His name! They are His. They have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ! It is His kingdom, His body, His family, His temple, and His bride! We should never be ashamed of wearing His name! Acts 4:12 says that there is salvation in none other besides through the name of Jesus Christ!

Throughout this religious world, denominations and religious organizations call themselves by many different names (including by the names of the men who helped establish them – i.e. Luther, Wesley) and they describe themselves in many different ways. However, congregations in the first century were identified in the ways we have considered in this lesson.

Let us always determine to do all things by Jesus’ authority and cast off the divisive names of men and become united in both name and doctrine – the name and the doctrine of Jesus Christ, the one who died for us! Let us be unashamed for the bride of Christ to wear the name of Christ!

Finally, as we close this lesson and prepare for the other lessons in this course, please be reminded that name is only one important factor in being part of Christ’s one true church. It is not the only important factor. So, let us strive diligently to be part of the one true church we can read about in the Bible - in all areas!

Study Questions

Should the church be interested in wearing a Scriptural name? Why or why not?

1. Is There Anything In A Name?

Does it matter what a church calls itself? Explain your answer.

Discuss the designation of the church as the body of Christ.

Is there anything important regarding the name of a child?

Discuss the designation of the church as the household of God.

Is there anything important regarding the name of a business?

Discuss the designation of the church as the temple of God.

Is there anything important regarding the name of your spouse?

Discuss the designation of the church as the bride of Christ.

Why is a name important?

Is name the *only* important factor? Explain.

Identify any other designation of the church here:

2. Names Used In Scripture

Discuss the general references to the “church.”

***Is the name of the church important? Is it the only important thing? Explain.**

Discuss the specific references to the church of God/Christ.

3. Descriptions Of The Church

Discuss the designation of the church as the kingdom of God/Christ.

The Church Of Christ

Lesson 4: The Establishment Of The Church

There are thousands of different churches and religious organizations throughout this world – with thousands of different points and times of origin. Each one of these religious organizations which are not truly Christ’s church began at a different place and a different time than Jesus’s church – and they all had different founders!

If we truly desire to learn about and be part of Christ’s one true church, shouldn’t we be interested to discover what the Bible teaches about the establishment of His church? There were both Old and New Testament prophecies made concerning the establishment of the church of Christ. Now, all of these prophecies have been fulfilled – but, they have *only* been fulfilled by the one true church Jesus Christ established!

If a religious organization began in any other place besides the place Jesus’ church began, it cannot be Christ’s church. If a religious organization began

at any other time besides the time Jesus’ church began, it cannot be Christ’s church. If a religious organization began in any other way besides the way Jesus’ church began, it cannot be Christ’s church.

Now, as we prepare to study this lesson, understand that we are talking about Jesus’ church in its “universal” sense. As we established in lesson 1, there is only one true church that belongs to Jesus Christ in this “universal” sense. This is how Jesus uses the word “church” in Matthew 16:18 when He says, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Local churches of Christ, as we briefly discussed in lesson 1, are composed of Christians in local geographic areas. These local churches begin at various points in time through the influence of many different individuals. These are fully authorized by God to exist. However, the focus of this study is on Jesus’ one true church in the “universal” sense (the totality of the saved). This study focuses on the beginning of His kingdom.

Therefore, the purpose of this lesson is to gain a greater understanding about how the establishment of the church of Christ in Acts 2 was the fulfillment of numerous prophecies that were made prior – and to understand that the true church must be able to trace its origin back to this significant point in time.

Old Testament Prophecies

The church of Christ (the kingdom of God) was not established during the Old Testament period. However, it was prophesied in those days. These prophecies provide useful information as we strive to understand the origin of the Lord’s church!

Isaiah 2:2-4

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, And

rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.”

In this text, the “mountain of the Lord’s house” is symbolic of God’s governance over His people (as Mount Zion near Jerusalem became symbolic of Jerusalem and the rule of God over His people). Specifically, the reference in this passage is the kingdom God would establish and call people of all nations to be part of.

Notice the specific prophecies that are contained within this reading. (1) People of all nations would be given the opportunity to be part of this kingdom. (2) God would give His law that would govern His people from Jerusalem (i.e. it would first be proclaimed in Jerusalem). (3) Those who were part of this kingdom would “beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore” – indicating that these citizens (though members of various nations) would be at peace with one another and would not use physical warfare to advance the cause of this kingdom. (4) This kingdom would “come to pass in the latter days.”

Daniel 2:31-45

“You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

“This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all —

you are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold — the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.”

In this text, Daniel is providing the king of Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar) with the interpretation of his dream. Read all of Daniel chapter 2 to get the full context of this passage. The chapter begins by identifying that Nebuchadnezzar was greatly troubled by his dreams – so much that he was unable to sleep. Therefore, the king sought diligently for someone who would be able to reveal the proper interpretation of it. Daniel was the one who was willing and able to provide the accurate interpretation of the dream. Specifically, the dream was concerning a statue, each part of the statue representing four succeeding earthly kingdoms. The statue had a head of gold, representing the Babylonian kingdom. It had a chest and arms of silver, representing the Medo-Persian kingdom. It had a belly and thighs of bronze, representing the Grecian kingdom. And, it had legs of iron and feet partly of iron and partly of clay, representing the Roman kingdom. Then, in the days of this kingdom (the Roman kingdom), a stone was cut out of the mountain and broke the great statue in pieces – as it would be an everlasting kingdom and would be greater than all of these earthly kingdoms combined!

This kingdom, Daniel said, is the kingdom God would establish!

Notice the specific prophecies made in this passage concerning God's kingdom (the church). (1) God would establish a kingdom. (2) God's kingdom would be an everlasting kingdom. (3) God's kingdom would be established during the kingdom represented by the legs of iron and feet partly of iron and partly of clay (the Roman kingdom). (4) This kingdom would begin small and would grow to be great.

Joel 2:28-32

“And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the Lord Shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, As the Lord has said, Among the remnant whom the Lord calls.”

This text records both great hope and great destruction. As is frequently true regarding prophecies in Scripture, the language is symbolic and apocalyptic – not language to be interpreted literally. The passage speaks of a time of judgment upon the enemies of God and a time of deliverance for those who will submit to God's rule and call upon Him. In reference to God's kingdom/church, you should notice that this is the prophecy Peter repeated in Acts 2:17-21 (on the Day of Pentecost), when he said that the events transpiring on that day were the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (written here)! Certainly, this prophecy points to the time at which God's people could call upon Him for salvation through Jesus Christ and be part of His kingdom – and those who rejected Him would experience the judgment and destruction depicted in this prophecy.

Notice the specific prophecies made in this passage concerning God's kingdom (the church). (1) God's Spirit would be poured out on all flesh. (2) The one who would call upon the name of the Lord would

be saved from the destruction. (3) This would “come to pass afterward” (or, “in the last days” – Acts 2:17).

Micah 4:1-8

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, And rebuke strong nations afar off; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, And no one shall make them afraid; For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. For all people walk each in the name of his god, But we will walk in the name of the Lord our God Forever and ever.

“‘In that day,’ says the Lord, ‘I will assemble the lame, I will gather the outcast And those whom I have afflicted; I will make the lame a remnant, And the outcast a strong nation; So the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion From now on, even forever. And you, O tower of the flock, The stronghold of the daughter of Zion, To you shall it come, Even the former dominion shall come, The kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.’”

Observe the similarity in the language of this text and the prophecy made by Isaiah in Isaiah 2:2-4. Both passages identify the “mountain of the Lord's house” that would be established. Again, Micah is pointing to the future kingdom of God reigning over His people and some characteristics of this kingdom.

Notice the specific prophecies made about God's kingdom in this text. (1) This kingdom would be established in the “latter days” (i.e. last days). (2) This kingdom would be superior to all other kingdoms. (3) People of all nations would be given the opportunity to be part of this kingdom. (4) It would be established in Zion (Jerusalem). (5) The law of God for His people would go forth from Jerusalem (i.e. it would be first proclaimed in Jerusalem and would then spread throughout the world). (6) The kingdom would be peaceful among

itself and would not advance its cause through physical warfare.

Summary

The prophecies about the Messiah who would come and offer the forgiveness of sins was the main theme of the Old Testament story. Throughout the Old Testament, God provides prophecies about the Messiah that would serve to identify Jesus Christ whenever He would come to the earth. In close connection with the coming of the Messiah also were these prophecies concerning God's kingdom that would be established and His new covenant (the gospel). We have specifically noticed four Old Testament prophecies concerning the kingdom God would establish. Now, we will turn our attention to the New Testament and continue to watch these things unfold. Keep all of these prophecies in your mind and watch their fulfillment!

The Coming Of The Kingdom

When the period of the Old Testament ends and the New Testament begins, the Bible story entirely focuses on the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning God's plan of redemption through the Messiah. "Christ is coming" had been the theme of the Old Testament. Now, as the New Testament describes the birth of Jesus Christ, the Bible story shifts to the message of "Christ is here."

As the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) record the events concerning the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, we continue to notice important references to the coming of Christ's kingdom. This message was central to the ministries of John (the Baptist) and Jesus Christ (the Messiah).

So, at this point in our study, let's focus on some of the teaching about the coming of the kingdom during the ministries of John (the Baptist) and Jesus – and continue to observe prophecies that were made concerning the kingdom of God (even in the New Testament).

The kingdom of Heaven is "at hand"

During the ministry of John, the Baptist, he taught that the kingdom of Heaven was "at hand." Matthew 3:1-2 records: "In those days John the

Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'"

Now, the phrase, "at hand" was used to indicate that something was near/close. Therefore, the NIV translates John's statement as: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." So, you should observe a few things from this passage. (1) The kingdom had not yet been established as of when John made this statement. (2) The kingdom was a heavenly kingdom (a spiritual kingdom), not an earthly kingdom. (3) The time for the kingdom to be established had come near to them (it was almost here).

Then, you need to pause to consider when it was that John made the statement concerning the kingdom of Heaven being "near." Luke 3:1-2 (a parallel passage to the one in Matthew 3) says, "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness." While this passage identifies some of the regional rulers at this time, I want you to specifically notice the reference to "the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar." Tiberius Caesar became the emperor of Rome in A.D. 14 and reigned until his death in A.D. 39. Therefore, the time of John's proclamation for the nearness of God's kingdom was during the reign of the Roman Empire (think back to the Old Testament prophecy in Daniel 2)!

I will build My church

John, the Baptist, was not the only one to make reference to the coming of this heavenly kingdom. This was also a major theme of Jesus' earthly ministry! Notice, specifically, Jesus' statement to Peter in Matthew 16:18-19: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Again, notice some important conclusions from this passage concerning the church. (1) The terms "church" and "kingdom" are used

interchangeably in this passage. (2) The kingdom/church had not yet been established. (3) Jesus would be the builder of the church – and it would be His church. (4) There would only be one church/kingdom that would be established by God. (5) It would be established during the lifetime of the apostles – as it is said that the apostle Peter would have an influential role in the kingdom/church (as the other apostles also would).

This is just one instance in which Jesus taught concerning the church/kingdom He would establish. There were actually many times throughout Jesus' earthly ministry in which He taught concerning the kingdom and the nature of kingdom citizens. For instance, in Matthew 6:10, as Jesus was teaching His disciples how to pray, He said, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven." Notice that during this time in Jesus' ministry, the kingdom had not yet been established – as His disciples prayed for the kingdom to come.

In many other places, Jesus taught parables concerning His kingdom. Matthew 13 is just one specific chapter that contains several parables about His kingdom. Through these parables, Jesus was attempting to help those who heard understand the true nature of the kingdom – and what would be involved in kingdom citizenship. Read through each one of these parables and learn from Jesus' teaching about His kingdom.

Till they see the kingdom of God

The passages I have just listed are only a sample of Jesus' teaching about His coming kingdom. As you read the gospel records of Jesus' teaching, you should be careful to observe all of the references Jesus makes to His kingdom. This is His church He promised to establish.

However, I want you to take particular note of one promise that Jesus made concerning the establishment of His kingdom in Luke 9:27. After Jesus had just fed the 5,000 men (plus women and children) with the five loaves and two fish, He taught His disciples a great message about the establishment of His church, His coming death, and about dedication in following Him. Then, Jesus said, "But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God" (compare with Matthew 16:28).

As you observe the words of Jesus in this text, consider a few facts about Jesus' kingdom. (1) Jesus

is making a promise to His disciples about the kingdom/church. (2) This promise includes a specific time reference. (3) Jesus' kingdom had not already been established at this point. (4) Jesus' kingdom would be established within the lifetime of some who were present on that occasion!

Tarry in Jerusalem

After Jesus had been put to death by crucifixion, buried, and rose from the dead, Jesus gave some final instructions to His apostles prior to His resurrection. As you consider these instructions, you should observe that they have direct connections to the establishment of Christ's church (as we will see in Acts 2).

First, please observe that both the books of Luke and Acts were written by Luke to a man by the name of Theophilus (see Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1). The book of Luke focuses on the life of Jesus Christ. The book of Acts is a continuation of the book of Luke, picking up with the ascension of Jesus Christ and describes the establishment and growth of Christ's church. In fact, there is a small portion of the two books that overlap – concerning these final instructions of Jesus to His apostles and Jesus' ascension into Heaven.

Now, consider the instructions of Jesus in Luke 24:44-49: "Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.'"

Jesus' apostles were waiting for the promise of the Father (the coming of the Holy Spirit), as Jesus had promised them in John 14-16. He explained that His suffering, death, and resurrection were all necessary to fulfill the Old Testament Scriptures – and that they would be witnesses of these things and would preach the gospel of repentance and remission of sins to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Therefore, Jesus told His apostles that they needed to wait/tarry in the city of Jerusalem for this promise to be fulfilled (“until you are endued with power from on high”).

As Luke continues this record in Acts chapters 1 and 2, and we learn about the events that unfold in these two chapters, it is significant to observe that the apostles are in Jerusalem. After Jesus Christ ascended to Heaven from the Mount of Olives, Acts 1:12 says that “they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey.” This, then, provides the context for the events that begin to transpire through Acts 2! The disciples are being obedient to Jesus Christ and waiting in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father.

The Church Of Christ Is Established

With the apostles of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, waiting for the promise of the Father, we pick up the record midway through Acts chapter 1. The eleven apostles are in an upper room (recall that Judas Iscariot had killed himself earlier). There are a total of about 120 disciples present. At this time, Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples and apostles and speaks concerning the need to select a replacement for Judas. The Lord guides them to select a man by the name of Matthias. “And he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:26).

Acts 2

With this context, consider what Luke records in Acts 2:1-4: “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

The twelve apostles have the Holy Spirit come upon them and they are able to speak in tongues so that the people present in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost would be able to hear and

understand the message in their own native languages. As the Holy Spirit is directing them to speak God’s message and the people hear the sound, the people are confused and amazed concerning the events that are transpiring. Some are honestly questioning, “Whatever could this mean?” (Acts 2:12). Others are mocking, saying, “They are full of new wine” (Acts 2:13).

Then, Acts 2:14-21 records the following: “But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, ‘Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above And signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the Lord Shall be saved.”’” This, Peter said, was the fulfillment of the prophecy made by Joel (which we noticed earlier in this lesson)!

Peter then preaches Jesus Christ to the people. He says that Jesus was a man accredited to them by God through the miracles, wonders, and signs God had done through Jesus in the midst of the Jews. However, Jesus (according to the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God) was taken by the lawless hands of the Jews and was put to death. However, God raised Him up from the dead because it was not possible for Jesus to be held by death! David had even prophesied concerning this when He said, “For you will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will you allow Your Holy One to see corruption” (Acts 2:27; compare with Psalm 16:10). Peter states that David could not have been talking about himself – because he is both dead and buried, and his tomb was with them even that day! Instead, Peter says that David was speaking about Jesus Christ. He said, “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:32).

He continues in Acts 2:33-36: “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’” Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” So, as the “first gospel sermon” concludes, Peter calls upon the Jewish audience to accept the truth about Jesus Christ!

This call to accept the truth about Christ and the truth about the Jews being responsible for Jesus’ murder left those with sincere hearts with the question, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). To this question, Peter responded: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39). There was hope for them! There was a way they could be forgiven of their sins (through Jesus Christ by repenting and being baptized for the forgiveness of their sins)! Therefore, Peter continued to encourage and warn them all to save themselves from the perverse/corrupt generation that had crucified the Messiah (Acts 2:40)!

Then, the Scriptures record: “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them” (Acts 2:41). Verse 47 adds, “praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Jesus’ kingdom/church had now been established – and those who were being saved were being added to it by the Lord! From this point forward, the church and the kingdom are seen as being in existence! For instance, Colossians 1:13 says, “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.”

Christ’s church fulfilled all of the prophecies!

Take a few moments to think back over the prophecies that had been made concerning Jesus’ church/kingdom. Every one of these prophecies found its fulfillment in the church (the spiritual

kingdom) that was established in Acts chapter 2! This clearly marks the beginning point for Jesus’ one true church!

(1) Established by Jesus Christ. Jesus promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18). He died to purchase it (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 1:18-19). He is the One who was preached (i.e. Acts 2; Acts 8:5, 35). He is the One who was recognized as its Head (Colossians 1:18).

(2) During the lifetime of those in Luke 9:27. Clearly this was so. The events of Acts 2 were not very far removed from the time Jesus spoke in Luke 9:27. For instance, Jesus’ apostles are still living in Acts 2 (with the exception of Judas). Also notice that the kingdom was said to be in existence by the time Colossians 1:13 was written. Therefore, we are not still waiting for the coming of the kingdom!

(3) During the days of the Romans. We have already established that it was during the days of the Roman kingdom whenever the kingdom of God was “at hand” (Matthew 3:1-2; Luke 3:1-2). In Acts 2, it is still during the days of the Roman empire/kingdom – in fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel 2.

(4) Beginning in Jerusalem. The church was prophesied to begin in Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-4). Remember that Christ had instructed His disciples to tarry in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49). Whenever all of the events of Acts 2 took place, the apostles were in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4, 12).

(5) The last days. The church was prophesied to begin during the last days (i.e. Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-5). Peter, quoting from Joel, said that these things were taking place in the last days (Acts 2:16-17). According to other passages of Scripture, we can understand that the period of time from Acts 2 through present day are the “last days” (i.e. 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-7; Hebrews 1:1-3). These are the “last days” in the sense of this being the last dispensation (i.e. we are not awaiting any other law from God). The only thing we are waiting for is the coming of Jesus Christ!

(6) All nations. All nations were prophesied to flow into the kingdom/church (Isaiah 2:2). These things began on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 – when Jews gained access to the kingdom of God. It would not be long after this time before the gospel was proclaimed to the Gentiles and they would also be accepted into the kingdom of God (Acts 10-11). Now, all are able to be part of the church/kingdom –

and all are equal (see Colossians 3:11; Galatians 3:26-29).

(7) God's Spirit poured out. Peter identifies Joel's prophecy concerning this in Acts 2:17-18. The apostles received the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1-4. Later, the household of Cornelius would receive this same baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:47; Acts 11:15-17). Furthermore, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit would be given through the laying on of the apostles hands (Acts 8:17-18). Therefore, individuals would have gifts of prophesy, tongue-speaking, etc.

(8) Those who called on the name of the Lord were being saved. Such is Joel's prophecy (as quoted by Peter in Acts 2:21). The calling on the name of the Lord was preached during this time after the church was established (as in Romans 10:13). It was when individuals were obedient to the gospel's plan of salvation that they were calling on the name of the Lord (i.e. Acts 22:16). Therefore, we can conclude that calling on the name of the Lord involves obeying all of the gospel's plan of salvation: Hear God's word, believe, repent of your sins, confess Christ, be baptized – then, remain faithful. Individuals were first obedient to this plan of salvation in Acts 2 (i.e. verse 38, 41, 47).

(9) Began small and grew. Such is the picture presented in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 2). Jesus also taught this same point in the parable of the mustard seed (Luke 13:18-19). Indeed, there were initially only about 3,000 individuals who were part of the kingdom (Acts 2:41). However, the gospel has since been preached throughout the world and many have been added to the kingdom!

(10) Everlasting. Christ's kingdom was to be an everlasting kingdom (Daniel 2:44). Christ's kingdom was established in Acts 2 – and continues to stand today! Although it has faced numerous persecutions and has faced many physical obstacles, the kingdom of God continues to exist! Furthermore, even when this world has been destroyed and all the earthly nations and kingdoms are no more, God's kingdom will continue to stand (1 Corinthians 15:24)!

(11) Peaceful. This kingdom was not going to be about engaging in wars against earthly kingdoms (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3-4). Indeed, Christ's kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). Christ's kingdom would truly be a peaceful kingdom (Matthew 5:9). As the gospel has been proclaimed, Christians are

never (rightfully) taught to engage in physical wars against other kingdoms – for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven! Rather, Christians are taught to wage a spiritual war – proclaiming the gospel of Christ to a lost and dying world!

Conclusion

Every single prophecy made in the Old Testament Scriptures and the promises made in the New Testament concerning Jesus' church/kingdom finds its fulfillment in the church established in Acts 2! God did not fail in His attempt to establish His kingdom (as some people suggest today). His kingdom is not an earthly kingdom, but is a spiritual kingdom! Before Jesus' death, Jesus told the Roman governor Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36)!

Today, you can be a part of Christ's church/kingdom – no matter what your nationality is, your social status is, your economic status is, your educational level is, etc.! If you will accept Jesus Christ by faith and obey His commandments (calling on the name of the Lord), the Lord will add you to His church – just as He added about 3,000 to His church on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2!

We can now be part of His kingdom. We do not need to pray for its coming any longer (as Jesus had taught His disciples in Matthew 6:10). Acts 2 clearly marks the beginning point of Jesus' church – and Colossians 1:13 clearly identifies His kingdom as being in existence! This is because they are one in the same.

Therefore, as you seek to learn about and be part of Christ's one true church, it is important for you to recognize these fundamental truths about the establishment of Christ's church. The churches of men do not fulfill these prophecies! Only the church of Christ is the fulfillment of these prophecies! Any other place a church began is the wrong place. Any other time a church began is the wrong time. Any other founder a church has is the wrong founder. And so it goes for everything we have discussed during the course of this lesson! Certainly, in the fulfillment of these prophecies we can observe the great wisdom

and eternal plan of God for redemption (Ephesians 3:8-11)!

Study Questions

Should you be interested in being part of the church that began when the Scriptures said it would begin?

1. Old Testament Prophecies

What prophecies were made about the church in Isaiah 2:2-4?

What prophecies were made about the church in Daniel 2:31-45?

What prophecies were made about the church in Joel 2:28-35?

What prophecies were made about the church in Micah 4:1-5?

2. The Coming Of The Kingdom

Discuss how the kingdom was a central theme of the ministries of both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ?

Discuss some important aspects about John's statement that the kingdom of Heaven is "at hand."

Discuss some important aspects about Christ's teaching that He would build His church.

Discuss some important aspects about Christ's teaching that the kingdom would come prior to the death of man in Luke 9:27.

Discuss some important aspects about Jesus' instruction to His apostles to tarry in Jerusalem.

3. The Church Of Christ Is Established

In what chapter of the Bible do you read about the establishment of Christ's church? Discuss.

Discuss how the following prophecies were fulfilled:

A. Established by Christ –

B. During the lifetime of those in Luke 9:27

–

C. During the days of the Romans –

D. Beginning in Jerusalem –

E. The last days –

F. All nations –

G. God's Spirit poured out –

H. Those who called on the name of the Lord
were being saved -

I. Began small and grew –

J. Everlasting –

K. Peaceful –

The Church Of Christ

Lesson 5: The Universal And Local Church

As we saw in lesson 1 of this study, the word “church” (from the Greek word “ekklesia”) is used in various ways in the Scriptures. Most notably, this word is used with regard to God’s people. Then, whenever it is used in reference to God’s people, it is frequently used in reference to two things: The “universal” and the “local” church.

Although these two terms are not used in the Scriptures, certainly these terms accurately convey the ideas that are presented in the pages of God’s word. Therefore, it is important for us to consider these two specific Bible uses of the word “church” so that we can properly understand each one – and so that we do not reach false conclusions about the church.

The purpose of this fifth lesson in the study, “The Church Of Christ,” is to help you gain a better understanding of what the Bible teaches about the “universal” church and the “local” church. We want to investigate each one and discover what each term refers to, how you become a member of each one, why you should be a member of each, and learn about the responsibilities of membership to each one.

Sometimes the word “church” (the Greek word “ekklesia”) is used in a “universal” sense. But, what does the Bible refer to at these times? How do you join this church? Why should you join this church? What responsibilities do you have as part of this church? Let’s investigate.

What is the universal church?

First, please understand that the term “universal church” appears nowhere in the Bible. So, why do we use it? The term is simply an accommodative term that differentiates between the one church Christ promised to build (the universal church) and the many churches of Christ (referred to in the local sense). Again, while the term “universal church” does not appear in the Bible, the concept certainly does!

Whenever the word “church” is used in this “universal” sense, it refers to the collection/congregation of the saved. Jesus used the word in this sense in Matthew 16:18: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Notice that the term “church” is singular. Jesus was only establishing one church. He only has one assembly/congregation of the saved – only one church! He does *not* have many separate organizations/collections of people! So, whenever the word “church” is used in this “universal” sense, it refers to Christ’s one congregation of saved people (all of the saved who have ever lived). Acts 2:47 also demonstrates that it was those who were being saved who were being added to this church.

Now that we have briefly defined what the term “universal church” references, let’s consider a few specific areas about the universal church. Let’s consider what the Bible teaches about its organizational structure, its work, and its worship to help you better understand this church.

(1) The organizational structure of the universal church. As we will see in a few moments, the local church has been given a God-approved earthly organizational structure. However, the universal church has no earthly organizational structure!

The universal church has no human head, no counsel of men, and no man-made creed books to govern the church! Therefore, the universal church of Christ has no man, woman, or counsel at the top of the organization to oversee its operation (we'll see why in just a moment). However, many of the man-made churches today do have a hierarchical structure over their churches that govern all of their local churches and members. Some churches have a president, some have governing bodies, some have counsels, the Catholic Church recognizes the Pope as its earthly leader, etc.

However, the church of Christ has Jesus Christ as its only Head! Colossians 1:18 says, "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." Only Jesus Christ is identified in the Scriptures as having authority over the universal church (the totality of the saved)! There is simply no authority for any other earthly organizational system over the universal church!

Jesus Christ is the one who has been given all authority (Matthew 28:18) – and we must do everything in the "name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17)! He is clearly identified in the Scriptures as being the "Chief Shepherd" (1 Peter 5:4) – even above the elders (shepherds) in local congregations. He is the only one who has absolute authority over His church. He is the one and only King over His Kingdom. He is the one and only Head of His body.

As a result, the universal church submits itself only to Jesus Christ. It does not submit to any man or group of men over (or equal to) Jesus Christ! The church's only creed is the Bible – the revealed word of God that will judge us on the Last Day (John 12:48; Revelation 20:11-15).

(2) The work of the universal church. As we'll see in a few moments, the local church has been given a particular work to accomplish by God. However, the universal church is not engaged in any collective work (whereby the church pools its resources together for the purpose of accomplishing a collective work). That said, those who are members of the universal church have the God-given responsibility to accomplish a particular work – as individual Christians (not acting collectively as the universal church).

Remember, there is no God-authorized earthly organizational structure over this universal church. Therefore, there is no way to pool the resources of the universal church or organize and carry out a collective work! Yet, many denominations have established such an earthly headquarters for their members and churches to contribute to financially. Then, those who are in positions of authority over these churches determine how the collected funds should be allocated and what work should be accomplished.

While this sort of arrangement is commonly seen as a good thing and a way to expedite the work of the church, it is entirely without authority! You can search the entire New Testament and never find such an arrangement. Instead, God has given His people a work to accomplish *individually* and the local church a work to accomplish. And, since this is the only authorization that has been given by God, we can be assured that God's work can be entirely carried out in this way (as it was in New Testament times).

(3) The worship of the universal church. As we'll see in a few moments, the local church has been given specific instructions to worship God collectively. However, the universal church has no responsibility to worship God collectively. Remember, since there is no earthly organizational structure over the universal church, there is no one on earth who has the authority to call together an assembly of the universal church. No man (or group of men) has the authority to mandate such an assembly or set a specific place where the universal church must assemble together for worship.

The only one who has this authority is Jesus Christ (the Head of the church). However, as you search the Scriptures, you will not find any instructions concerning an assembly of the universal church (except when we will all be together and worship God eternally in Heaven). There is no regular pilgrimage to a particular earthly meeting place identified or required of Christians today. Quite simply, there are no Biblical instructions that require or authorize an earthly assembly of the universal church.

That said, individual Christians should be regularly worshipping God. In John 4:23-24, Jesus said: "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” God’s people are authorized to worship any time and any place they have the opportunity and desire to worship God. And, individual Christians can worship God together (see Acts 12:5). Particularly, local churches are given specific instructions to regularly assemble together and worship God (1 Corinthians 14; Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:24-25). Yet, individual Christians can and should worship God outside of these assemblies as well.

Furthermore, the church anticipates the day in which we will all be in Heaven worshipping the Lord together for all eternity. On that occasion, in that beautiful place, we can all join together in worship before the throne of God. However, there are no instructions or authority for the collective assembly and worship of all of God’s people on earth!

How you become a member of the universal church

How do you become part of Christ’s church (His collection of the saved)? You do this by becoming a Christian. Notice how individuals were added to the universal church in Acts 2. Specifically notice verses 37-42: “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’ 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.” Verse 47 says, “praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

This passage comes in the context of Peter and the other apostles preaching the gospel on the Day of Pentecost (after Jesus had ascended to Heaven). Verse 37 records the response of the people to the preaching, asking “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then, after Peter had given them

instructions to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins, he continued preaching to them and about 3,000 people were obedient to the instructions. Particularly, note, then, that these individuals were added to “the church.” So, it is upon obedience to God’s commandments involved in becoming a Christian that an individual is added to Christ’s church (i.e. the “universal church”) – and counted among the saved!

You need to understand, then, what God has commanded you to do in order to become a Christian and be added to His church.

(1) You must hear the word of God. Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Hearing God’s word is a necessary step before you are capable of believing or obeying it. For instance, Acts 18:8 says that the Corinthians first heard God’s word, then they believed and were baptized.

(2) You must believe. Listen to Jesus’ words in John 8:24: “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” Believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is necessary for salvation and is a prerequisite to baptism (see Acts 8:37). However, “faith only” is not sufficient for salvation or entrance into Jesus’ church. James 2:24 plainly says, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (see also Matthew 7:21-23).

(3) You must repent of your sins. When Paul was preaching to idolaters in Athens, he said that God “now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Also, repentance was identified as being necessary whenever Peter was preaching to the Jews in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:38. Repentance is a change in mind regarding past sins – and a determination to make the necessary changes and live for the Lord.

(4) You must confess Jesus Christ. Notice the language of Romans 10:9-10: “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” A good example of this confession is seen in Acts 8:37, just prior to the baptism of the man of Ethiopia: “Then Philip said [to the man of Ethiopia], ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may [be baptized].’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’”

So, this is not a confession of sin; but, it is a confession of the Lord Jesus Christ (see also Matthew 10:32-33).

(5) You must be baptized. Specifically, the baptism that God requires of people today is the baptism (immersion) in water for the forgiveness of sins. This is the baptism that the man of Ethiopia was baptized with in Acts 8:38-39: “So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.” According to the Scriptures, this baptism is necessary to “be saved” (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:20-21), to be forgiven of your sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16), and to come into Christ (Galatians 3:26-27).

Specifically, the Bible teaches that it is at this point that an individual is added to Christ’s church. Again, this is what was seen in Acts 2:37-47. The 3,000 who were obedient to the instructions to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins were added to the church. In fact, the Scriptures teach us that we are baptized into one body. Consider 1 Corinthians 12:12-13: “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” Now, this passage is not teaching that we are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the one body of Christ. Instead, as we obey the instructions of God’s Holy Spirit (who revealed the things written in the Bible), we comply with the command to be baptized — and enter Jesus’ body (church)! Galatians 3:26-27 demonstrates the same point: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Therefore, baptism (immersion in water) is the specific point at which we are forgiven of our sins and added to Jesus’ church.

Then, you are expected to remain faithful to Jesus throughout your earthly life. Jesus instructed Christians to be “faithful until death” in order to receive the “crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). If we fail to remain faithful to God, we lose our salvations. Galatians 5:4 records Paul’s comments to the Galatian Christians who had “become estranged from Christ” and “fallen from grace.” John 15:2

makes reference to the unfruitful branch (the fruitless disciple of Christ) being taken away. Verse 6 says that the branch that does not abide in Christ is “cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.” Therefore, if you fall away from God after becoming a Christian, you must again seek His forgiveness (through repentance, confession, and prayer, see Acts 8:22 and 1 John 1:9).

If you have not done these things, you are not part of His church — because you have not been forgiven of your sins and are not counted among His saved people! Not if you have faith (see James 2:14-26). Not if you profess allegiance to Jesus Christ (see Matthew 7:21-23). Not if you have had water sprinkled or poured on your head (see Romans 6:3-4). Not if you have done anything other than what God has commanded! And, not even if you have done what God has commanded for the wrong reasons! For instance, some are baptized after they believed they were saved. Or, some are baptized into the churches of men rather than being baptized into Jesus’ church. However, this is all done for the wrong reasons!

Why you should be a member of the universal church

Why is it even important to be a member of this universal church? First, you need to be a member of this church because the church is composed of the saved — and the saved are part of this church. Those who are not saved are not part of this church. Therefore, if you are not part of this church, you are not in a saved condition. Remember, the Lord was adding “to the church...those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Those who are part of Christ’s church will forever live with the Lord in Heaven; but, those who are not part of His church will experience the eternal punishment of Hell (Revelation 20:15).

Second, you need to be a member of this church because there is only one true church. Christ only promised to build one church (Matthew 16:18) — and He only built one church (Acts 2:41, 47)! Therefore, Paul said that there is only “one body” (Ephesians 4:4). There is no other body that contains those who are saved other than the church of Christ. Acts 4:12 says, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” There is salvation

in no other church besides in the church that belongs to Jesus Christ!

Responsibilities of membership

What does it mean to be part of the universal church that belongs to Jesus Christ? What responsibilities does membership into this church have? Remember that there is no earthly world-wide oversight of the universal church (Christ is the only Head of the universal church). Therefore, your responsibility as part of the universal church is to be faithful to Jesus Christ.

Revelation 2:10 summarizes this responsibility: “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” Jesus expects His followers to faithfully endure through all of the trials, temptations, and persecutions of life. He expects His followers to possess the character that is approved of God (i.e. Colossians 3:12-17). He expects His followers to be laboring for Him (1 Corinthians 15:58). He expects His followers to be living holy lives (1 Peter 1:15-16). He expects His followers to be doers of God’s word in all areas of their lives (James 1:22), including obeying His commandments concerning His Christian brothers and sisters.

The Local Church

Sometimes the word “church” (the Greek word “ekklesia”) is used in a “local” sense. But, what does the Bible refer to at these times? How do you join a local church? Why should you join a local church? What responsibilities do you have as part of a local church? Let’s investigate.

What is a local church?

First, please understand that the term “local church” appears nowhere in the Bible. So, why do we use it? Again, the term is simply an accommodative term that differentiates between the one church Christ promised to build (the universal church) and the many churches of Christ (referred to in the local sense). And, while the term “local

church” does not appear in the Bible, the concept certainly does!

Whenever the word “church” is used in this “local” sense, it refers to an assembly/congregation of Christians who have joined themselves together in a local geographic area (i.e. Rome, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Colossae, etc.). While there is only one church (in the “universal” sense), the Bible does refer to many different churches (i.e. the church in Corinth, the churches of Galatia, the church in Philippi, etc.). These different churches are simply local churches (not different denominations)!

Furthermore, local churches exist for a purpose – according to the Lord’s design! God has provided a blueprint for this local assembly that is given in the New Testament. He has provided a blueprint regarding the organizational structure, work, and worship of the local church. We will now proceed to highlight these things at this time – and focus on them in greater detail in future lessons.

(1) The organizational structure of the local church. Unlike what we have observed regarding the universal church (which had no God-given earthly organizational structure), God has given local churches an organizational structure. Philippians 1:1 summarizes this organizational structure: “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.”

Within a local congregation, God has designed for there to be “bishops” (also called “elders,” “shepherds,” “pastors,” “overseers,” and “presbyters” in the Scriptures). These men must meet specific qualifications in order to serve in this capacity and they have been given the oversight of the congregation. Deacons also must meet specific qualifications to serve in that capacity – and have the role of serving the needs of the congregation. Finally, the “saints” refer to all those who are Christians.

Please also note that while a local church should have overseers (elders) and deacons, there are times when a local congregation does not have men qualified to fulfill those offices (according to the qualifications given in the Scriptures). These local congregations were still authorized to exist in New Testament times. For instance, Acts 14:23 references a time when Paul and his companions were appointing elders in every church. Yet, the necessary inference is that these churches were in existence prior to having elders appointed to oversee them.

Still, God's plan is for there to be elders, deacons, and saints in every local congregation. We'll spend a greater amount of time focusing on the organizational structure of the local church in lesson 6.

(2) The work of the local church. Unlike what we observed regarding the universal church (which had no collective work), God has given the local church a specific work to accomplish (collectively). The authorization God has given local churches in the New Testament regarding their work is (1) proclaiming His word, (2) edifying/building up itself, and (3) exercising benevolence toward needy Christians.

Now, individual Christians have been given many different works and responsibilities in the pages of God's word. However, as it specifically relates to local congregations, God has limited their work to these three areas. We will be giving each one of these areas our attention in lesson 7 of this series.

(3) The worship of the local church. Unlike what we observed regarding the universal church (which had no collective earthly assembly or worship), God has authorized the local church to assemble and worship together. The authorization God has given local churches in the New Testament regarding their collective worship is (1) prayer, (2) singing, (3) preaching/teaching, (4) the Lord's Supper, and (5) the collection.

While individuals can and should be worshiping God outside of the assemblies of the local church any time they have opportunity to do so (see John 4:23-24), there is a specific God-given responsibility for local churches to be engaged in these five specific acts of worship. We will be giving each one of these areas our attention in lesson 8 of this series.

How you become a member of a local church

Please understand that when you are obedient to the gospel's plan of salvation, you are added to Christ's universal church (as we discussed previously). However, this does *not* automatically make you a member of a local church! Still, it is important to become a member of a local church (when possible). We'll discuss why momentarily. For now, please consider how an individual actually becomes a member of a local church.

As we look to the Bible for its answer to this question, we should carefully consider the example of Saul. This is the most direct example of an individual attempting to join a local church that is given in the Scriptures. That said, please recognize that any time you read about a local church in the Scriptures, it implies that individuals joined themselves together in that way!

After Saul (later known as Paul) had become a Christian, he attempted to join the disciples in Jerusalem. Acts 9:26 says, "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." Clearly, the disciples were afraid of this man (having known about his past persecutions of Christians) and were skeptical of permitting him to join the local church in Jerusalem. However, Barnabas (in verse 27) took Paul and brought him to the apostles, declaring how Paul had seen the Lord on the road, how the Lord spoke to Paul, and how Paul had preached boldly in Damascus in the name of Jesus.

Now, consider a couple of lessons from this example – and some conclusions based on them. (1) It is an individual decision for a Christian to join himself/herself to the disciples in a particular area (i.e. to a specific local church). Therefore, an individual who becomes a Christian should seek out a local congregation of Christ's people to join himself/herself to (if possible). Or, he/she may need to attempt to start a local church. Either way, it is the responsibility of the Christian to seek out a local church to associate with. Then, that Christian must let his/her desire to join the congregation be made known to the congregation.

(2) The members of a local church can refuse to allow an individual to join them. Please consider that each local congregation should be diligent in accepting those who wish to join the congregation; yet, it must also be careful as to who is accepted into the congregation. Once again, notice that the church in Jerusalem did not accept Saul into the congregation until *after* Barnabas took him and demonstrated that Saul really was a Christian! This same point can also be demonstrated from Acts 20:28-31. In this text, Paul warned the Ephesian elders about "savage wolves" who would come in among and harm the flock (that local congregation). Therefore, he told them to "watch." Also consider how 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15

demonstrate that congregations have the responsibility to withdraw (withhold fellowship) from members who have left the Lord. Quite simply, the test of fellowship for anyone to be a member of a local church is summarized in 1 John 1:5-7. This passage helps us to understand that if two people are each in fellowship with God, then they are in fellowship with one another. Therefore, if someone is in fellowship with God, they should be permitted to join a local church!

Next, before we consider some reasons why you should desire to be a member of a local church, let's consider how you should choose a local church to be a member of. (1) Choose a church in or near your community, when possible. This is what we saw with Paul whenever he came to Jerusalem and tried to join himself to the disciples there in Jerusalem. Other examples of local churches would demonstrate the same point – the Roman Christians were members of churches in Rome, the Corinthian Christians were part of the church in Corinth, the Jerusalem Christians were members of the church in Jerusalem. There is great benefit to be part of the local church that is in or near to your community! (2) Only join a church that is doing what is right. Not all churches believe or practice the right things. There are many local churches (even local “churches of Christ”) that are not following the New Testament pattern (2 Timothy 1:13) and do not do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:17). In this case, God does not want you to be in fellowship with them. Ephesians 5:11 says, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.” (3) Sometimes there may not be a faithful congregation of the Lord's people in your community (or a nearby community). In this case, you will want to try to start a local church that practices only New Testament Christianity.

Why you should be a member of a local church

I do not read any passage in the Bible that makes *local* church membership necessary for salvation. If it was, you would not be able to be in a saved condition until you joined yourself to a local church. Furthermore, there are a number of times in which individuals become Christians (and members of Christ's universal church); but, there are no local churches of Christ in their communities practicing the things instructed by the New Testament. For instance, what about the man of Ethiopia in Acts 8?

Verse 39 says that he went on his way rejoicing after he became a Christian. However, it mentions nothing about this man joining a local church. There may or may not have been a local church in Ethiopia for him to join at that time.

That said, the approved example throughout the New Testament is for individuals who become Christians to join themselves to other Christians in a local geographic area. There is overwhelming evidence to support joining local churches. Notice that every time you read about a local church in the Scriptures, it implies that individual Christians joined themselves together in that way! Certainly, there is wisdom involved in God's plan for local churches – and we should not be quick to determine *not* to join a local church! Consider some reasons why you should be a member of a local church.

(1) You will help accomplish God's work in your local community. God's people (the church) is identified as being the pillar and support of truth (1 Timothy 3:15). That is, God's people (the church) hold up the truth of God's word. Therefore, a local church will be responsible for holding up God's word in a local community. The local church in Thessalonica is an excellent example of this (see 1 Thessalonians 1:8). You should attempt to use your talents, abilities, and opportunities to contribute to the work of spreading the gospel and accomplishing all of the God-given work of the local church. Ephesians 4:11-16 makes it very clear that each member of the body of Christ has something positive to contribute to the overall function of the body. Thus, whenever a local body (church) of Christ has members who are dedicated to doing their parts, the gospel of Christ will be spread, Christians will be strengthened, needs will be met, and glory will be given to God! Furthermore, while we certainly have individual responsibilities, we must not underestimate the good that can be done whenever individuals work together as a team rather than working separately (see Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)!

(2) You will be assembling with your brethren and worshiping God together. God is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). While this can and should be done privately, the approved examples of the Scriptures also show that this is to be done collectively as a local church. In fact, each local church has the obligation to assemble together on the first day of the week. These assemblies of the local

church are beneficial to everyone who is involved. Along with the worship that is given to God, there is strength that is to be gained from such worship – as you can know that you are not alone in worshipping God! Furthermore, there are some things that you only read about local churches doing whenever they were together. For instance, the Bible only identifies the Lord’s Supper and the collection as things that are done when the church has come together (see Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

(3) You share in edification. Christians cannot fulfill the instruction to encourage one another daily if they are all alone! Hebrews 3:12-13 warns about the danger of departing from God and about the deceitfulness of sin. So, the passage instructs Christians to offer daily encouragement to one another so that they would not succumb to the daily temptations of life! God has provided a base of fellowship and strength that is greater than the individual Christian – which is the local church! Therefore, as a member of the local church, you will be both encouraging to your brothers and sisters in Christ and you will be receiving encouragement from them. You will be gaining as well as helping to supply the needed strength to overcome the shared obstacles, temptations, and trials of life! Not only will this come from your interactions with your brethren; but, it will also come through your collective acts of worship and Bible teaching (both publicly and privately)!

(4) You share in accountability. There is accountability in a local church. If there are elders in the church, they help watch over the souls of each member (to make sure that the members are living right). However, all of the members in a congregation must share in the responsibility to watch over each other’s souls! This is implied in James’ instructions in James 5:19-20: “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” Each member of a local church should be willing to receive correction from their brethren whenever they sin. Generally speaking, there is a love and concern for the spiritual well-being of each member of the congregation! And, there are even times when this love and concern will make it necessary for a local church to withdraw from an erring brother or sister (see 1 Corinthians 5 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15).

Responsibilities of membership

Clearly, there are great blessings associated with being a member of a local church. Being a member of a local church helps each Christian to stay the course of faithful living throughout his/her lifetime! It is designed to make it more difficult for Christians to drift away from faithfully serving God. However, along with the blessings of local church membership, there is also individual responsibility to the local church.

Consider some of the responsibilities briefly. (1) Each member of a local church must be devoted to fulfilling his/her God-given responsibilities toward his/her Christian brethren (particularly in the local church), see Galatians 6:1-2. (2) Each member of the local church has the responsibility to faithfully attend and participate in the assemblies of the local church (see Hebrews 10:24-25). Willfully absenting yourself from any of these assemblies is sinful. (3) Each member of a local church has the responsibility to conduct his/her life in such a way that is faithful to God (Revelation 2:10). (4) Generally speaking, every member of a local church must be willing to contribute however he/she can contribute to the local church. Each member is a part of the local body of Jesus Christ – and provides something unique and useful to the overall health and function of the body (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and Ephesians 4:11-16)! Therefore, each member should seek to find ways to utilize his/her talents, abilities, opportunities, strengths, etc. in the service of the Lord and in the local church! Realize that the work of the local church will only be accomplished (most effectively) whenever every member contributes what he/she is capable of contributing!

Conclusion

Throughout the pages of the New Testament, you can read about both the universal and the local church. If you want to be saved, you must be a part of Christ’s universal church. In addition, it is a wise and God-approved thing to choose to be part of a local church of Christ that is dedicated to following the pattern of sound words (revealed in the New Testament).

Beginning in the next lesson, we will be turning our attention directly to the local church. Specifically, we will be focusing on its organizational structure in lesson 6, its work in lesson 7, and its worship in lesson 8. We want to discover the God-given pattern for local churches in each one of these areas.

Study Questions

What are the two ways the term “church” is frequently used in Scripture?

1. The Universal Church

What is the universal church?

*What is the organizational structure of the universal church?

*What is the collective work of the universal church?

*What is the collective worship of the universal church?

How do you become a member of the universal church?

Why should you be a member of the universal church?

What are the responsibilities involved in being a member of the universal church?

2. The Local Church

What is the local church?

*What is the organizational structure of the local church?

*What is the work of the local church?

*What is the worship of the local church?

How do you become a member of a local church?

Why should you be a member of a local church?

What are the responsibilities involved in being a member of a local church?

Lesson 6: The Organizational Structure Of The Local Church

In lesson 5 we saw some differences in how the Bible uses the word “church” in a universal sense and in a local sense. Among the differences we observed was regarding its organizational structure. The universal church has no earthly organizational structure. That is, there is no man, woman, or counsel that sits atop the universal church on this earth. Instead, Jesus Christ is its only Head. Colossians 1:18 says, “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” Furthermore, there is no authority for one local church to be “head” over the other local churches. Rather, each local church is designed to be autonomous (self-governing).

In contrast with the universal church (and its lack of an earthly organizational structure), God has given each local church a specific organizational structure. He has certainly equipped the local church with all it needs in order to be self-governing. He has given it a work to accomplish (a work that is not too large for it to accomplish) and He has given it an

organizational structure that is sufficient to accomplish its purpose. Please simply notice that there is absolutely zero New Testament authority for one local church to govern the affairs of another local church!

In addition, as we begin to consider the God-given organizational structure for a local church, it is important to recognize that local churches were authorized by God to exist without this organizational structure (i.e. without elders and deacons). Consider the language of Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5. Acts 14:23 says, “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Titus 1:5 says, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.” Both of these passages necessarily infer that congregations were in existence prior to the appointing of elders. God did not condemn their existence without elders. In fact, God only wants congregations to appoint elders and deacons when there are men who meet the qualifications He has given (as we will see later).

Still, it is important to recognize that even though congregations were authorized to exist in the New Testament without elders and deacons, this was not what God *desired* from them. There was a reason elders were appointed in every church in Acts 14:23. Whenever a congregation is *not* organized according to the pattern we will see in this lesson, notice that something is said to be “lacking” – according to Titus 1:5. This organizational structure God has given for the local church is more than just a *good idea*! This is something which ought to be pursued by the entire congregation!

Now, as we prepare to begin looking at each part of the organizational structure God has given for the local church, consider Philippians 1:1: “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” The God-given blueprint for the organizational structure of the local church is summarized in this text: Bishops (elders), deacons, and saints.

The purpose of this sixth lesson in the study, “The Church Of Christ,” is to help you gain a better understanding of the God-given organizational structure of the local church. Note that this applies to every local church.

Elders

The Scriptures refer to “the position of a bishop” (1 Timothy 3:1). The *English Standard Version* of the Bible refers to such as “the office of overseer.” This is a God-given “office” in the local church. In fact, as we will see, the men who fill this office will serve in a role of oversight and spiritual leadership for the entire congregation.

Three Greek words refer to the same office

Whenever you read through the New Testament (and depending on which translation of the Bible you are reading from), you will come across a few different English words. Initially, you may believe that each one of these words refers to a different “office” or special position in the local church. However, upon closer examination, you should conclude that the terms “elders,” “presbyters,” “overseers,” “bishops,” “shepherds,” and “pastors” all refer to this same office! While all of these names are Scriptural to use, I will use the term “elder” or “elders” through most of this lesson when referring to this office, for the sake of simplicity.

Why are all of these words used in our English Bibles in reference to the same office? There are two reasons. First, sometimes there are archaic (no longer commonly used) and modern (more commonly used) English words that mean the same thing. For instance, both “presbyter” and “elder” refer to someone who is older – “presbyter” is an archaic English word. “Bishop” is an archaic English word for the term “overseer.” “Pastor” is an archaic English word for “shepherd.” Second, there are actually three Greek words used in reference to this office. Why are three separate Greek words used for the same office? Each one provides useful information about the people who will fill this office and the work they will be doing. Consider these three Greek words with me.

(1) Presbuteros. This is the Greek word that is commonly translated either “presbyter” (archaic English word) or “elder” (modern English word). The Greek word generally refers to someone who is older. In fact, context will determine whether this word is used in its general sense (simply referring to someone who is older) or whether it refers

specifically to this office in a local church. Therefore, when this word is used specifically in reference to this office in the local church, it tells us that an older man (someone who has life experience) will fill this office.

(2) Episcopos. This is the Greek word that is commonly translated either “bishop” (archaic English word) or “overseer” (modern English word). The Greek word refers to a man who is charged with the duty of seeing that things which are done by others are done in the right way, applicable to a curator, a guardian, or a superintendent, etc. (see *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament*, Strong’s number G1985). Specifically, as this word is used in the New Testament with reference to this office in the local church, it emphasizes the work that will be done by these individuals (a work of overseeing the local congregation).

(3) Poimen. This is the Greek word that is commonly translated either “pastor” (archaic English word) or “shepherd” (modern English word). This Greek word simply has reference to the one who does the work of shepherding. But, while it generally refers to a physical shepherd who leads physical sheep, this word is also used to identify the men who serve as elders and spiritually shepherd the flock (the local church). Like “episcopos,” this word emphasizes the work that these individuals have been given to do.

Now, I have made the claim that each one of these Greek words has reference to the same office in the local church – and not to different offices or individuals. But, how can we know whether that is true? Consider two passages with me. First, consider Acts 20. In this passage, verse 17 identifies that Paul (when he was in Miletus) “sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.” Verse 18 says that when they had come to him, Paul began to speak with them (a discourse that would continue through verse 35). Then, notice what Paul tells these “elders” in verse 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.” So, these “elders” were made “overseers” so that they would “shepherd the church of God.”

Next, consider 1 Peter 5:1-4: “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder

and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” Again notice that when Peter wrote to exhort the “elders” that he instructs them to “Shepherd the flock of God...serving as overseers.”

Both of these passages demonstrate how these three words are all used interchangeably with reference to the men who fill this office in the local church. Each one of these words helps us to understand the nature of this office within a local congregation. What we can conclude is that the men who will fill this office must be older men who have gained life experience (and experience in Christian living), who are committed to watching over the souls of those within the local congregation. These individuals take the lead in a local congregation and serve as models for the rest of the congregation to imitate and follow.

These individuals must meet specific qualifications

Realizing the seriousness of the work these men will be doing and the influence they will have in a local church, God did not leave man with the responsibility of arbitrarily deciding who would make good elders. Instead, He has provided strict guidelines that must be met by the ones who will fill this office. These qualifications are recorded in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. As we notice these qualifications, pay attention to each one and recognize that these qualifications are not optional. Rather, they are all essential in order for an individual to be rightly appointed to this office!

1 Timothy 3:1-7 says, “This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice,

lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

Titus 1:5-9 says, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you — if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

Notice that there are two basic categories for these qualifications: Personal qualifications and family qualifications. A man who has all of these qualifications will certainly be an excellent leader for a local church to help the members of the local church live in a way that will please God! Specifically, the family qualifications that are given in the text (regarding his marriage and his children) will demonstrate his ability to lead others in the ways of God. Again, 1 Timothy 3:5 asked, “if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?”

In addition, take a moment to consider some specific observations from these qualifications. Only older married men with Christian children will rightfully fill this office. Not women. Not single men. Not men without children. Not men with very young children. Not men without Christian children. These observations are significant because there are many religious organizations (many local churches) today that will have (so-called) “pastors” or “elders” who are not older married men with Christian children! Some churches today have women “pastors.” Some churches today have homosexual “pastors.” Some churches today have “pastors” or “elders” who are single men. Some churches today have “pastors” or “elders” who are not old enough to have Christian children. Again, we must hold fast to the pattern God has revealed in the pages of the New Testament (2 Timothy 1:13)!

The work of elders

What is the work of those who meet the God-given qualifications and are appointed as elders in a local church? The Greek words we have already discussed that are used to identify the men in this office provide an excellent framework for understanding the work that these men will be responsible for. Namely, this is the work of overseeing and shepherding the congregation. But, in addition to this observation, consider some passages which specifically identify aspects of the work of elders.

(1) They are to exercise oversight. 1 Peter 5:2-3 says, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” They are not to be lords over the congregation; but, they must act as loving shepherds. Thus, they provide direction for the congregation and make sure that the things done by the congregation and individual members of the flock are according to God’s will.

(2) They must be examples. Hebrews 13:7 says, “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.” This commandment is applicable to elders in a local church. The members of the local church are expected to be paying attention to the ways in which the elders are living – and striving to imitate their godly examples. Certainly, the elders are expected to be godly men who are demonstrating a high standard of Christian living for the rest of the congregation to be able to follow! Just go back and consider the specific qualifications that we studied to see how God expects the elders to be living.

(3) They lead and watch over the souls of the congregation. Hebrews 13:17 says, “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.” Clearly, those who are elders have been given the oversight of the congregation (as demonstrated from 1 Peter 5:2-3). Not only does this involve the things which are done collectively by the congregation; but, this passage also demonstrates that the elders must be watching out for the souls of each member of the congregation.

Again, they are to be shepherding each sheep in the flock (the congregation). The seriousness involved in this is seen in the fact that they will give an account for how they have carried out this work.

(4) They will watch out for danger. When Paul was meeting with the elders of the Ephesian church, consider what he told them in Acts 20:28-31: “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. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” Part of exercising oversight in the local church will be watching for any danger to the flock. There are certainly many “savage wolves” (spiritually speaking) that would love to come in and destroy a local church (i.e. through false teaching). In addition, Paul warns that they watch out for danger that could come from among themselves as well (either from the congregation or the eldership itself).

(5) They must stand boldly for the truth. Consider what is said about elders in Titus 1:9-11: “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.” The elders (who are not new converts to Christ, according to their God-given qualifications) must have a solid understanding of the truth – and be willing and able to stand against those who are speaking or acting contrary, for the good of the flock!

(6) They must fulfill their responsibilities willingly and with joy. Go back and review 1 Peter 5:2-3 and Hebrews 13:17. In fact, when we considered the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, notice that the passage began by saying, “If a man desires the position of a bishop...” There must be a desire to serve God and the local church in this capacity. Certainly, this is not an easy work to do and one that will take a willingness and joy to accomplish

– as well as to endure all of the cares and trials that will come when an individual serves in this capacity.

Multiple elders in one local congregation

We have established that God has designed for men to fill this office – and have established the qualifications he has placed upon such people. But, how many men does God want to fill this office in a local church? Can only one man serve in this capacity? Does he specify anything concerning this question? Let’s consider.

The Scriptures repeatedly demonstrate that God desires for there to be a plurality of elders in every congregation. Again consider the language in Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5. Acts 14:23 says, “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Titus 1:5 says, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.” In both of these passages, notice that “elders” (plural) were appointed/to be appointed. Nothing is said about appointing a single elder to oversee a congregation.

In fact, the only approved example in the New Testament is for there to be elders (plural) in one congregation. There is no Bible authority for just one elder (or pastor or bishop, etc.). Consider that the church in Jerusalem had “elders” (Acts 15:2). The church at Ephesus had “elders” (Acts 20:17). Whenever an individual was sick and wanted prayer, he/she was to call for the “elders” of the church (James 5:14). We simply never read about just one elder, bishop, pastor, overseer, presbyter, or shepherd of a congregation in the New Testament. Instead, there is always a plurality of elders! Therefore, a local church must have at least two men who are qualified to be elders in order to be rightly organized in this way!

The great wisdom of God is demonstrated in this fact! Having only one man who leads a local congregation could easily result in perversions to God’s word (as he would be the only one overseeing and leading the congregation). However, having a plurality of elders serving in this capacity creates checks and balances, where there is accountability in the eldership. In addition, please note that the Scriptures do not authorize a system in which one of the elders takes a leading role over the others. Instead, they are all to be equal and have equal

authority. Read 3 John 1:9-11 to see God’s condemnation of one man who elevated himself above the congregation!

Elders oversee one local congregation

How far does the authority of elders reach? Does their authority reach beyond the local church – or is it limited to the local church? The Scriptures clearly demonstrate that their oversight is limited to the congregation they are members of themselves. Again, in Acts 20:28, Paul told the Ephesian elders to “take heed” to themselves and to all the flock, “among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” 1 Peter 5:2 also records the instruction for elders to “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you.”

No elder or group of elders have any authority beyond their local congregation! They do not have authority to oversee multiple congregations (i.e. a separate smaller church without elders). They do not have authority to oversee a separate work that is not being accomplished by the local church they oversee (i.e. an orphanage, teaching program, etc.).

Their authority is limited by the New Testament only to include the congregation they themselves are members of. There is absolutely **zero** authority for any other arrangement! Again, the great wisdom of God is seen in this. Whenever this authority is violated or perverted, a hierarchical structure develops (like the Catholic diocese). Furthermore, elders simply cannot properly provide oversight for a congregation they do not regularly attend! For instance, how would the elders know what was being taught if they were not present for the teaching?

Deacons

Not only is the office of elders part of the organizational structure of the local church; but, the office of deacons is also part of the God-given organizational structure for the local church. While the Scriptures do not give us as much detail regarding the office of deacons as it does regarding the office of the eldership, we will spend time discovering what we can know about the role of deacons in the local church.

Greek word for “deacon”

As with the elders, let’s begin formulating our understanding for this role in the local church by considering the Greek word used in the New Testament for “deacon.” Again, we will be able to gain a greater appreciation for the work of a deacon by establishing this point.

The Greek word that is translated “deacon” is also translated “servant.” It is the word “diakonos.” Like we saw with the word “presbuteros” (elder), “diakonos” has a general and a specific meaning – and the context will dictate which is under consideration in a specific passage.

Generally, the word “diakonos” means servant. Romans 16:1-2 is an example of this general use: “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.” This Christian woman was a “servant of the church in Cenchrea” (the word “servant” is the Greek word “diakonos”). But, she did not occupy the office of a deacon – because this passage helps us to understand that she did not meet the God-given qualifications for such (as we’ll see momentarily). Still, she was a servant of the church (in a general sense).

Specifically, the word is used with reference to an office in the local church. The term is used in this way in Philippians 1:1, when Paul greets the bishops, deacons, and saints in the Philippian church. Also, the word is used in this specific way in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 – as the passage identifies the God-given qualifications for those who will fill this office. Still, even in the specific use of this word (in reference to an office in the local church) the overall idea of a “servant” holds true!

These individuals must meet specific qualifications

Just as we saw regarding the elders, God has given specific qualifications for the deacons of a local congregation. These qualifications are given in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Notice each one of these qualifications as you read this passage and understand that each one of these qualifications is absolutely essential for an individual to rightly be appointed as a deacon!

1 Timothy 3:8-13 says, “Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Once again, you should notice that there are both personal and family qualifications for these individuals to meet. These individuals also should be good examples of how to live a godly life – and their service to God as deacons will simply be a continuation of how they have faithfully served God and their families in the past! Also, notice some specific observations from these qualifications. Only married men with children will fill this office. Not women. Not single men. Not men without children. Certainly all of these individuals can be servants in a general sense (as Phoebe was, Romans 16:1-2). However, those who will rightly fill the role of being a deacon in the local church must meet all the qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:8-13!

The work of deacons

Since elders have the work of oversight and shepherding the congregation, what work do the deacons have? There is actually very little information given in the Scriptures concerning the specific work these men will accomplish. However, we are not without *any* information on the subject. In fact, God has given us enough information that we can make right conclusions about the nature of their work.

First, you must remember what it means to be a deacon. Remember that the Greek word refers to someone who is a servant. Generally this is true (as we saw in Romans 16:1-2). However, this same idea must also be applied to its specific use regarding deacons. They serve as special servants of the church.

Second, the passage in Acts 6:1-7 will prove to be helpful as you study the work of deacons: “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. 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. 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; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.' And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith."

Though these seven men are not called "deacons" in the text, their work fits well with the service deacons should be performing as servants of the church. As we will see in greater detail in lesson 7, part of the work of the local church is to take care of needy Christians. Notice that these seven men were able to focus on this work and make sure it was accomplished – so that the apostles could focus on their God-given work and responsibilities. Thus, the work of these seven contributed to the word of God being spread and individuals being saved! In the same way, deacons will serve the church in ways that will help ensure that needs are met and that others (i.e. the elders) are able to focus on their God-given responsibilities, thereby contributing to the spiritual good that is accomplished!

Saints

Once again, Philippians 1:1 mentioned bishops (elders), deacons, and saints – as Paul addressed the local church in Philippi. Therefore, let's give some consideration to the things God has said about "saints" in a local church – though we will not be discussing everything God teaches about the role of individual Christians or their role in local churches. A brief overview should be sufficient for the purpose of this study.

Individual Christians – not an "office" in the local church

We have clearly seen that not all members of a local church can serve in the capacity of elders and deacons. Not all the members will be qualified to serve in such capacities and not everyone will desire to serve in such capacities. Therefore, all other Christians (as well as the elders and the deacons) will be fulfilling the roles that are given to individual Christians (saints).

The religious world today has done much harm to people's understanding of the word "saint." Today, a "saint" is commonly believed to refer to a prominent dead Christian. However, the Bible very clearly uses the term to refer to all Christians – even those who were living. For instance, Paul wrote to the bishops, deacons, and saints in Philippi (Philippians 1:1). Was he writing to the living or to the dead? Many other passages demonstrate the same point – Acts 26:10; Romans 1:7; Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 16:1; Ephesians 1:1; etc.

The word "saint" is the translation of the Greek word "hagios." This term simply refers to someone who is holy and set apart from evil. This is true of all Christians – who have been set apart from their sin and are devoted entirely to God (see 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Peter 1:15-16)! So, whenever the word "saint" is used in the Bible, it is used to refer to a Christian!

However, as you consider the inclusion of "saints" as part of the organizational structure of the local church (as seen in Philippians 1:1), please understand that this does not constitute a special "office." All Christians (even the elders and deacons) are saints. But, not all saints are elders and deacons. Yet, every saint/Christian has an important role to play within a local church!

The work of individual Christians

The Bible is full of instructions concerning the work of individual Christians. However, just consider a few basic points with me for the purpose of this lesson. All Christians must fulfill these responsibilities within the local church they have joined themselves to!

The work of saints includes: (1) Taking an active role in teaching the gospel in the community (Acts 8:4), (2) doing good to everyone according to

opportunity (Galatians 6:10), (3) serving others (John 13:14-15), (4) submitting to the elders of the congregation (Hebrews 13:17), (5) attending and participating in the assemblies of the local church (Hebrews 10:24-25), (6) fulfilling God-given responsibilities toward the brethren (Galatians 6:2; Hebrews 3:12-13), (7) helping to restore those who have fallen away from Christ (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20), (8) being zealous for every good work (Titus 2:14), (9) doing what each one is capable of contributing (Ephesians 4:16), (10) fulfilling all the God-given responsibilities relative to living a faithful Christian life (Revelation 2:10), etc.

Each Christian has something to contribute

You see, every individual Christian who is a member of a local church has something he/she can contribute to the local congregation! Each one has different abilities, opportunities, knowledge levels, interests, strengths, etc. that can benefit the group. If each Christian would simply do his/her part, the local congregation could be all that God desires for it to be! However, if even one member of the church decides not to do his/her part, the local congregation will not function at its maximum ability! Along with 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 4:16 describes the benefit of every member supplying his/her part: “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.”

Evangelists

Bishops, deacons, and saints represent the organizational structure of the local church (i.e. Philippians 1:1). However, I want to spend just a few minutes discussing the role of evangelists – as they often interact with local congregations. In this section, I want to create some basic awareness. But, we simply will not be able to study this in great detail at this time.

Not an “office” in the local church

Evangelists are often part of local churches. This is fully authorized by God. For instance, Philip (an evangelist) labored in the region of Samaria (Acts

8:5). Later, Philip went to Caesarea (Acts 8:40). Then, in Acts 21 (around 20 years after the events in Acts 8), Philip continues to be working to preach God’s word in Caesarea (see verse 8). Perhaps this was with one local church, perhaps it was not. Definitively, the Scriptures say that Paul labored in Ephesus, working with the congregation there for three years (Acts 20:31). Other examples could also be provided; but, suffice these to help demonstrate the point that evangelists worked in a specific region for extended periods of time.

The term “evangelist” simply refers to a preacher of the gospel (someone who brings the good news of Christ to others). In this way, every Christian should be an evangelist – as all Christians have the responsibility to teach the gospel to the lost (see Acts 8:4 and 2 Timothy 2:24-26). However, the term is particularly applied to those who make their livelihood through preaching the gospel. The Bible gives authority for individuals to be supported financially by their brethren and by local churches so that they can commit to a full-time work of proclaiming the gospel to others (see Philippians 4:15-16; 2 Corinthians 11:8) – and references them as having a role in the edification of the church (Ephesians 4:11-16).

However, although these individuals may be involved in working with a local church to preach the gospel “full-time” in a specific area, these individuals have no special authority over a local church in their role as evangelists! Yet, because of their frequent involvement in the work of local churches, it is profitable to take a moment to consider their “qualifications” and their work, according to the Scriptures.

The “qualifications” of evangelists

For those who wish to do the work of a full-time evangelist, the Scriptures do inform us of some basic “qualifications” for them. Although these are not listed in a single passage or two (like was true concerning elders and deacons), there are many things said of these individuals (especially in the apostle Paul’s letters to the young evangelist, Timothy).

Consider some things that could properly be considered to be qualifications for those who wish to do the work of an evangelist: (1) It must be a man (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12), (2) he must keep himself pure (1 Timothy 5:22), (3) he must

be diligent (2 Timothy 2:15-16), (4) he must be steadfast in faith, loyal in truth, refusing false speculative doctrines and uncompromising toward those who teach them (1 Timothy 1:3-11; 1 Timothy 4:1, 6; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Timothy 4:1-5), (5) he is to be an example to those who believe (1 Timothy 4:12), (6) he is to exercise care for both himself and for what he teaches (1 Timothy 4:16), (7) he is to fulfill the instructions in 2 Timothy 2:22-26, etc.

As you carefully consider these passages, you should consider that these qualifications are of both a personal nature and applicable to his treatment of God's word. He must be faithful to the Lord both as a Christian and as an evangelist. He must, therefore, faithfully and accurately teach God's word to others.

The work of evangelists

The work that God has given evangelists to accomplish can be seen through a study of the entire New Testament. Yet, again, Paul's letters to Timothy (and also to Titus) prove to be particularly beneficial in an attempt to summarize the work of an evangelist.

Consider the following points regarding the work of an evangelist: (1) He is to preach the word faithfully and without regard for how it is received (2 Timothy 4:1-4), (2) he is to help complete what is lacking within the organizational structures of local churches (Titus 1:5), (3) he is to give himself entirely to the work (1 Timothy 4:13-16), (4) he is to warn against apostasy (1 Timothy 4:1-6), (5) he is to guard the faith (1 Timothy 1:3; 1 Timothy 6:20-21), (6) he is to handle the word of truth correctly (2 Timothy 2:15), (7) he is to assist in the building up of local congregations (1 Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:5), etc.

Conclusion

The local church has been designed in the way that God desires to accomplish its God-given purpose. Mankind must not make any changes to it and cannot improve upon it! God has designed it in a way that will effectively accomplish its mission, according to His great wisdom!

All local churches should desire to be organized in this way (i.e. Philippians 1:1). However, if there are not individuals who meet the qualifications, a local congregation must not appoint individuals to these offices (i.e. elders and deacons).

Individually, however, we must all fulfill our God-given roles in the local church (no matter what our roles are)!

Study Questions

Does the universal church have an earthly organizational structure?

Has God provided the local church with an organizational structure?

1. Elders

How many Greek words are used in reference to this office in the local church? What do these words indicate?

What qualifications must these individuals meet? List some observations concerning these qualifications.

What is the work of elders?

How many elders must there be?

What is the scope of the elders' oversight?

2. Deacons

What does the Greek word "diakonos" mean?

What qualifications must these individuals meet?
List some observations concerning these qualifications.

What is the work of deacons?

3. Saints

Who are “saints”? Does this constitute an “office” within a local church?

What is the work of individual Christians?

What is the importance of each Christian’s contribution to the local church?

4. Evangelists

Does this constitute an “office” within a local church?

What qualifications must these individuals meet?
List some observations concerning these qualifications.

What is the work of evangelists?

Lesson 7: The Work Of The Local Church

God has authorized the local church to exist – and He has done so for some specific reasons. Among these reasons, we can plainly observe that God has authorized some specific work to be accomplished by the local church. That is, a locally organized group of Christians (a local church) can work in conjunction with one another as one unit to accomplish some specific works in the Lord’s cause.

Consider the value of working together as a team as opposed to only working separately from others – as demonstrated in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12: “Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. 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. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

As we begin to focus on the specific work God has given to each local congregation to accomplish, it is certainly worth noting that God has only given a local church a work that is within its scope and ability to accomplish. He does not expect or demand for a local church to accomplish something that is beyond its ability to accomplish. However, He also does not expect less of a local church than it is capable of accomplishing. Throughout the pages of the New Testament, local

churches of Christ were self-governing (autonomous) and each one was responsible for its own work that it was capable of accomplishing.

Therefore, each local church must be diligent to accomplish its own work! Since this lesson is about the work God has given to each local church, let’s begin by realizing that it is “work” – even before we consider the specifics about the work. By its very nature, it will take work/effort (just as each individual Christian must be diligent and put forth effort to accomplish the work God has given us as individuals). Realize that the only way for a local church to accomplish its work to the greatest extent of its ability is for each individual member of the body to participate in that work! Then, as congregations make decisions in the area of its collective work, certainly it must never be found neglecting the opportunities and responsibilities that have been given to the congregations in those areas.

Then, another important piece to consider as we begin this lesson is to consider how this God-given work is funded. As we discuss the work God has given a local church to accomplish, it will be clear that there is a financial element involved. So, how does God authorize a local church to raise these funds? The only Bible authority given for how a local church raises funds is found in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 (specifically addressing how they were to raise funds for the work of benevolence): “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 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.” This is a free will offering of the members of the local church that is taken up on the first day of the week. There is no mandated amount or percentage for each individual to contribute – just as an individual has prospered. This is the only way God has authorized for His local churches to raise funds to accomplish their work. Note that He does not authorize the use of bake sales, rummage sales, collections to be taken on other days of the week, or any other means for the purpose of raising money for the work of a local church.

As we focus on discovering what God teaches about the church of Christ – and as we are focused on learning about the local church in this section of lessons, we want to study about the work of the local church. The purpose of this lesson is to help you understand what God teaches about the

work He has given for local churches to accomplish and to learn about some works He has never authorized local churches to accomplish (which are commonly being done by local churches today, even by many local “churches of Christ”).

Individual Versus Collective Action

Is there any distinction between what an individual Christian is authorized to do and what the church (collectively) is authorized to do? Does it make any difference to God? Let’s investigate this from the Scriptures.

The need to distinguish the two

There is a distinction between what the individual Christian is authorized to do and what the church (collectively) is authorized to do! Yet, some say that there is no difference in the two. However, an appeal to the Scriptures and to sound reasoning will be able to conclude that the church is not authorized to do everything that an individual Christian is authorized to do. Instead, we must look specifically to the work God has given local churches to accomplish.

Consider this passage as evidence that there is a distinction between the two. 1 Timothy 5:3-16 says, “Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. And these things command, that they may be blameless. But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work. But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they

have cast off their first faith. And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some have already turned aside after Satan. 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.”

As Paul writes to the young evangelist, Timothy, in this passage, Paul is giving instructions concerning how to care for Christian widows (note that this was a great concern among the early church, see Acts 6:1-7). However, he limits the responsibility of the church with regard to providing assistance to these individuals. Instead of placing this responsibility upon the church or giving local churches the authority to provide benevolent assistance to them, he gives individual responsibility to some. First, notice how he limits the responsibility of the church to regularly provide younger Christian widows (under sixty years old) with benevolent help – placing the responsibility, instead, on the younger widows to remarry (verse 11). Second, Paul limits the responsibility of the church to regularly provide for widows who have family to care for them – placing the responsibility, instead, on those family members to care for their widows and instructing that the church would not be burdened by this responsibility (verses 3-5 and 16).

Furthermore, you should notice Paul’s direct disapproval of the church providing assistance to those who do not meet specific qualifications. Look closely at verse 9-10. In fact, Paul tells Timothy that it is the church’s responsibility to “refuse” giving regular assistance to some who are widows (verse 11). Then, Paul states that the church is not to be “burdened” by regularly relieving some widows – so that it can focus on doing the work God has really given it to do (specifically, the work of relieving those who are “really widows”), see verse 16.

Clearly, there was personal responsibility in this passage regarding the work of providing relief to widows. Younger widows have the responsibility to remarry (see verse 14). Then, Paul gives individual responsibility to family members. Look at verse 16 again, “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.” Earlier, Paul said that children and grandchildren have the personal responsibility of having respect for and repaying their parents (verse 4). So, these individuals have the personal responsibility of working to provide for the needs of his own family members – and he is said to be “worse than an unbeliever” if he refuses to do this (verse 8)!

After considering Paul’s instructions, ask yourself: Can the church (collectively) do *everything* that an individual Christian is authorized to do? Clearly, God has made at least one distinction in the two (in 1 Timothy 5:3-16)! So, we must be careful to observe the specifics in every passage to see whether God is speaking concerning individual action or collective action.

Individual action

All individual Christians have many responsibilities that are given to him/her. Some of these responsibilities correspond with the work of the local church. For instance, the individual Christian has the responsibility to be involved in the work of evangelism (even separate from the work of the local church), see Mark 16:15 and 2 Timothy 2:24-26. An individual Christian also has the responsibility to be involved in the work of edifying (spiritually building up) his/her Christian brethren (even apart from the work of the local church to edify), see Hebrews 3:12-13 and Matthew 18:15-17. Then, God has also given individual Christians the work of exercising benevolence toward needy Christian brethren as they have opportunity (even apart from the work of the local church in this area), see Acts 11:29-30 and Galatians 6:10.

However, there are also a number of responsibilities that God has given to individual Christians that are unique to individual Christians. We have already seen this to be true regarding the care He expects us to show toward our family members (1 Timothy 5:3-16). We have been given responsibilities as husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, and children (see Ephesians 5:22-6:4). We have been given the responsibility of developing the right character as Christians (see 2 Peter 1:5-7). We have been given the responsibility to help all who are in need, according to our own abilities (see Galatians 6:10 and James 1:27).

Clearly there are things God has authorized and expects us to do as individual Christians. Some

of these things (as we’ll see) correspond with the work of the local church. However, there are also clearly areas of responsibility that have only been given to individual Christians – that have not been given to the church (collectively).

Collective action

There are specific works God has instructed His people to be involved in – acting collectively as local churches. Therefore, we must be diligent to search the Scriptures and accurately interpret whether the things that are authorized are given to local churches or to individual Christians. When we do this, we discover that God has given the local church the three specific works of: Evangelism, edification, and benevolence. We will now turn our attention to considering each one of these three works.

Evangelism

God has given His people (both individually and collectively) the work of spreading His saving message to others. This is the way God has chosen for His message to be spread – through His people telling other people about the way of salvation in Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:21 says that “it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”

The work of all Christians

Christ’s church (His people) are to be holding up the gospel of Christ in this world. 1 Timothy 3:15 says that the “church of the living God” is the “pillar and ground of the truth.” Now, as we discussed in lesson 5, there is no collective action of the universal church to teach the gospel of Christ; but, it is the responsibility of all those who compose this church to hold up the truth of God’s word!

Therefore, it is the responsibility of each individual Christian to preach the gospel. Consider how other passages of Scripture also demonstrate this same point. Mark 16:15 records the commission Jesus gave to His disciples regarding the work of preaching: “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’” Acts 8:4 demonstrates how that the Christians who were persecuted by Saul in Jerusalem were “scattered” and

“went everywhere preaching the word.” Furthermore, 2 Timothy 2:24-26 identifies some things which the servant of the Lord “must” do. Included in this text is the responsibility of attempting to teach those who are in opposition to the will of God.

Individual Christians can teach the gospel through many different authorized means. They can talk to their friends, neighbors, family members, and other personal contacts. They can distribute Bible study material to others as they have opportunity. They can organize and teach home Bible studies. They can utilize many different avenues to fulfill their work of teaching the gospel to others – by the general authority that is given for Christians to be teaching God’s word.

Local churches must teach the gospel

Consider one specific example of the work that was accomplished in the New Testament by one local church preaching the gospel to others. 1 Thessalonians 1:8 says, “For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.” First, note that Paul was addressing the local church in Thessalonica (notice that this is the subject for the pronoun “you” in verse 8). Thus, through the work of this congregation, the gospel of Jesus Christ had been “sounded forth” not only in their own region, but in “every place.” What a testimony to the faithfulness of this congregation regarding their God-given responsibility of teaching the gospel as they had opportunity. Every local church today would do well to imitate the excellent example of this congregation!

The responsibility of local churches in teaching the gospel is particularly seen in examples of New Testament churches doing this work – and specific things they were doing to accomplish the work. Consider a few basic points with me.

(1) Preaching in the assemblies. Local churches in the New Testament taught the gospel as part of their worship assemblies. As we’ll see in lesson 8, teaching the gospel of Christ is one of the ways a local church is expected to worship God in its assemblies. For instance, consider Acts 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.” This was not merely conversation with those who were present, but the formal proclamation of a message. The implication is that this was a gospel sermon. Specifically, notice that this was also an assembly of the local church in Troas (as the disciples came together on the first day of the week to take of the Lord’s Supper – another act of worship for the local church in its assemblies).

1 Corinthians 14:22-25 also demonstrates that local churches would preach the word of God in their assemblies: “Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.” Now, please realize that a number of Christians had miraculous spiritual gifts (like tongue-speaking and prophesy) in New Testament times. These gifts were used to demonstrate that they were speaking words of truth from God (prior to the completion of the New Testament text, see Hebrews 2:4). So, as this passage describes the use of these spiritual gifts in these assemblies, they were involved in the proclamation of God’s word. Specifically notice how this text demonstrates unbelievers would even be influenced through this teaching in the assemblies of the local church.

Therefore, a significant part of the way a local church can preach the gospel is through the public teaching that is accomplished during its assemblies (teaching both the believers and the unbelievers). This is certainly a function of the regular assemblies held by local churches – and also can be the focus of special assemblies that are called by the church to teach the lost or strengthen the church in the teachings of Christ (i.e. modern day “Gospel Meetings”).

(2) Sending/supporting preachers. Local churches in the New Testament taught the gospel by sending preachers and by supporting preachers to preach. Whenever the local church in Jerusalem heard about the conversion of people in other areas, notice what action they took: “Then news of these

things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch” (Acts 11:22). Then, the following verses describe how Barnabas served as an encouragement to these new Christians and how many others were added to the Lord. Please notice, then, that this great work was accomplished (in part) because of the determination of the Jerusalem church to send Barnabas to accomplish it! Then, Acts 13:1-3 identifies the work of the church in Antioch to send Saul (Paul) and Barnabas on a preaching journey. You can, then, read through Acts 13, 14, and 15 to see the great work that was accomplished and the souls that were saved during this journey – and know that the church in Antioch had a central role in accomplishing it!

Similarly, consider how local churches preached the gospel by providing the necessary support to gospel preachers (sending it directly to the evangelists). Paul demonstrates that he received financial support to enable him to devote a greater amount of time to preaching God’s word to others. In 2 Corinthians 11:8, he wrote concerning the support he received to preach in Corinth: “I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you.” Then, in Philippians 4:15-16, Paul again states that he had received financial support for his work of preaching: “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. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.”

Therefore, another of the ways local churches are authorized to preach the gospel is through sending preachers to preach the gospel in specific areas and in financially supporting the work of preachers. These congregations, then, share in the good that is accomplished by these preachers!

(3) Using funds to spread the word in the community. Though there are some things relative to specific authority in the area of preaching the gospel, local churches have been given a great deal of general authority in how they are to teach the gospel. For instance, 1 Thessalonians 1:8 identifies that the Thessalonian church had a great influence through preaching the word of God; but, the passage does not specify how they accomplished the work.

Congregations, then, must be careful to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15) and determine which areas of their evangelistic work are

specified in Scripture and which areas are left up to their discretion. In keeping with the general authority to preach the gospel, local congregations have utilized many avenues for teaching God’s word – like printing and distributing material, running Bible articles in newspapers, paying for radio and/or television programs, running church websites, mailing Bible material to residents of certain communities, setting up booths at fairs and other community events to distribute Bible literature, organizing door-to-door campaigns, conducting public Bible studies, etc.

Edification

Another work God has given each local congregation of His people is the work of edification. As used in the Scriptures, “edification” refers to spiritually building others up in the faith of the gospel (making them stronger spiritually).

The work of all Christians

Christ’s local churches have the responsibility of building Christians up in the faith. However, this is also the work of individual Christians. Particularly, notice that those who are Christians have many responsibilities toward their Christian brothers and sisters that are part of their work of edification. Let’s begin considering this by noticing Hebrews 3:12-13: “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” So, Christians have the responsibility to encourage their brethren on a daily basis.

Specifically, you can search the Scriptures and find many references to the responsibilities Christians have toward their brethren – that will all contribute to their edification. They have the responsibility to correct those who are in sin (see Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20). They have the responsibility to bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). They have the responsibility to greet one another (Romans 16:16). They have the responsibility to be kind to and forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32). This is just a sample of the God-given responsibilities to individual Christians in the

area of edification. However, these are all ways for individuals to help build up their brethren in the faith of the gospel.

Local churches must edify themselves

Take a moment to consider Ephesians 4:11-16 and observe how God wants His people to be working together to build each other up – particularly within the context of local churches: “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.” This is true both generally (regarding all of God’s universal church supplying their parts to strengthen the body of Christ) – and specifically (regarding members of each local church supplying their own parts to strengthen the local bodies of Christ).

The responsibility of local churches in edifying themselves is particularly seen in examples of New Testament churches doing this work – and specific things they were doing to accomplish the work. Consider a few basic points with me.

(1) The organizational structure and role of the local church. Each local church can bring about the edification of the body through its God-given structure and role. For instance, part of the purpose God created local churches to fulfill is to provide oversight and accountability. As we studied in lesson 6, elders oversee and shepherd the local church (see 1 Peter 5:2-3 and Hebrews 13:17). Therefore, those who take part in local churches can gain the great spiritual benefit of this leadership – and be strengthened in the faith!

Then, not only is edification available in local churches because of elders; but, there is edification that results from the general accountability that is provided within a local church. For instance, every

local church has the responsibility to rebuke and withdraw fellowship from members who fall away from God and refuse to repent (see 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15). Therefore, this role of providing accountability for one another ought to result in each member of local churches being strengthened in the faith!

(2) The assemblies and teaching of the local church. Each local church also edifies itself through the assemblies of the church and through the teaching it does. These assemblies are not *just* for teaching those who are not Christians (as we discussed in the previous point); but, they also provide opportunities for Christians to be strengthened in the faith. Whenever local churches assemble together, all that is done must be done for the purpose of edification (1 Corinthians 14:26). In connection with this, then, each member of the local church has the God-given responsibility not to willfully forsake/neglect these assemblies (read Hebrews 10:24-25).

While we will discuss the various aspects of the worship of the local church in lesson 8, I want to identify them here and specifically discuss how each of these acts of worship that are done in the assemblies work for the edification of the church. (1) The Lord’s Supper causes us to remember the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and to evaluate our own lives. (2) Giving causes us to reflect upon how much the Lord has done for us and consider how we can give back to Him. (3) Praying causes us to acknowledge God as the one who cares and provides for us and causes us to draw strength in Him by casting our cares upon Him. (4) Singing causes us to think on spiritual truths and express praise to God in song. (5) Teaching causes us to learn and reflect upon the teachings of God’s word and builds us up (Acts 20:32). Therefore, part of the way a local church edifies itself is through the various acts of worship it engages in during the assemblies of the church – as well as through its general teaching (i.e. Bible classes). Note that not only do these acts edify the members; but, edification is also gained whenever they realize they are not alone in worshiping God in these ways!

Benevolence

The final work that God has given to each local church is the work of benevolence. However, as we will see, this work of benevolence has been limited. To be “benevolent” is to show kindness toward – specifically with regard to a gift. The benevolent work that has been given to local churches concerns providing needy Christians with the provisions relative to their needs.

The work of all Christians

Please think back to the very first point of this lesson. There is a difference between what individual Christians are authorized to do and what the church (collectively) has been authorized to do. This can especially be seen in the area of benevolence (as was demonstrated in 1 Timothy 5:3-16).

The individual Christian has been given the responsibility to show benevolence toward all those who are in need, according to the ability and opportunity of each one. Galatians 6:10 says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” James 1:27 says, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” You can look into the context of both these passages and observe the fact that they are both talking about individual responsibilities – not congregational responsibilities. Clearly, God wants His people to be individually involved in helping as many people in need as they have opportunity and ability to help.

Local churches must work to relieve needy saints

While individual Christians have the general responsibility to be benevolent toward those who are needy (whether Christian or non-Christian), there is **only** authority for local churches to use their funds for benevolence toward needy Christians. As we saw demonstrated in 1 Timothy 5:16, God does not want the church to be burdened by a responsibility of general benevolence. It has been limited only to include needy Christians.

Every passage in the New Testament that discusses the benevolent work of local churches

demonstrate this responsibility only toward needy Christians. Consider the following passages (I will add emphasis to these passages to demonstrate the subject of the benevolence, EMK).

Acts 2:44-45: “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.”

Acts 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. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 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, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.”

Acts 11:29-30: “Then **the disciples**, each according to his ability, determined to send relief **to the brethren** dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”

Romans 15:25-27: “But now I am going to Jerusalem to **minister to the saints**. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution **for the poor among the saints** who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.”

1 Corinthians 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: 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.”

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 (read all of chapters 8-9): “Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on **the churches of Macedonia**: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive **the gift and the fellowship of the**

ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.”

1 Timothy 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.**” [Note that verses 3-16 gives the context of those who are and are not “really widows.” The context demands that these are Christian women – and that they are at least 60 years old].

The scope of this work of the local church showing benevolence toward needy Christians is demonstrated in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 – that those brethren who have an abundance should help to supply their brethren during their times of lack (and vice versa). But, how is this work accomplished? Consider a couple of points.

(1) Money is collected and distributed.

Both in Acts 4 and 1 Corinthians 16, we saw that money was laid aside by Christians, collected by the apostles or a local church (note that we do not have apostles today), and then distributed to the one(s) who had the need. As mentioned earlier in this lesson, the only authority for a local church to gather funds for this work (or any other work) is through the free will offering on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

(2) Money sent directly to the ones/church in need. This can be seen in Acts 11:29-30, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, and Romans 15:25-27. There was no benevolent society or sponsoring church in between the local church sending the money and the ones receiving the money! Note that in Acts 11:29-30, the church *was* the need! They were not pooling resources to accomplish some other work (as is the case with the sponsoring church arrangement).

Unauthorized Works

We have now observed the extent of the God-given work of the local church. However, there are many churches today that have not been content to do all things according to the pattern of sound words contained in the Bible (2 Timothy 1:13). Instead, many churches participate in unauthorized works – or do authorized works in unauthorized ways. Therefore, they have perverted the Scriptures by

adding to and taking from God’s word – and have changed the local church into something God has never authorized it to be (i.e. a social club, a political organization, a general benevolent society, a collection agency for human institutions, etc.). Given the reality of congregations being involved in these unauthorized works, let’s quickly identify some popular errors before we close this lesson. However, please note that I will not have the opportunity to discuss why these things are wrong in this lesson – but do want to encourage your continued study.

Social reforms

Yes, the gospel of Christ will bring about social reforms – whenever it is accepted by others. However, the work of local churches is not political activism! The work of the church is spiritual in nature (as we have seen).

Social/recreational activities

While individual Christians may engage in recreational activities, it is not the work of local churches (collectively) to be involved in sponsoring and organizing such activities! These activities commonly include (but are not limited to): Plays, athletic activities/events, physical meals, family nights, movie nights, field trips, concerts, etc. See 1 Corinthians 11:22, 34.

Business ventures

The churches of Christ are not businesses – and must not be operated as such. They are simply not in the money-making business! Yet, many religious organizations engage in raffles, bake sales, carnivals, rummage sales, take up collections at every assembly (even when they are not on the first day of the week), etc.

Secular education

It is not the work of local churches to provide secular education for others. Yet, many religious organizations have built schools and colleges to provide for such (in addition to providing Bible instruction). Many other churches send financial support to such institutions.

General financial aid

Individuals have the responsibility (according to their ability and opportunity) to help all those who are in need (see Galatians 6:10 and James

1:27). However, local churches (collectively) have no authority to give their funds to those who are not Christians. Yet, many local churches will give money from their collective treasury to assist those who are not Christians.

Support human institutions

Many local churches today will send financial support from their treasuries to support human (man-made) institutions (i.e. missionary societies, orphan homes, widows' homes, colleges, etc.). Yet, there is simply no Bible authority for the church to contribute its funds to a man-made institution to accomplish a work through it!

Sponsoring church arrangements

Many local churches today will send their funds to other churches in order to pool their resources and accomplish a specific work (i.e. sometimes it is evangelistic work, sometimes it is benevolent work, etc.). However, each local church has only been given the responsibility to accomplish the work it is capable of accomplishing. There is no Bible authority for one church to send resources to another church that is "sponsoring" and will oversee a greater work!

Where is the authority?

All of these works have one thing in common: There is no Bible authority for them! Although many folks attempt to find authority for these things, and claim them to be good works, there is simply no Bible authority for them! Often, these works are justified on the basis of the "good" they are said to accomplish. However, a thing can never truly be "good" if it deviates from what God wants us to be doing (read 1 Samuel 15 to see an example of this)! The "end" does not justify the "means"!

Conclusion

There is a pattern concerning the work that local churches are authorized to engage in – and they must hold fast to this pattern (see 2 Timothy 1:13)! Local churches must do all things in the name of (by the authority of) the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17)!

As we have seen throughout this study, the work of local churches is spiritual in nature – not physical! They are to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are to spiritually build people up in the faith of the gospel. And, they are to provide needy brothers and sisters in Christ with the things they have need of.

As we conclude this lesson, let's determine to let the church be the church! That is, let's allow local churches to focus on fulfilling the work God desires for them to accomplish – in the way God wants them to accomplish it! There is enough work to be done in these areas without adding unauthorized works that will steal away its focus and fail to fulfill the will of God. Let us always demand Bible authority (New Testament authority) for all that is accomplished!

Study Questions

How has God authorized the local church to gain funds in order to accomplish its work?

1. Individual Versus Collective Action

Why do we need to distinguish the two? What does 1 Timothy 5:3-16 demonstrate?

Discuss the authorized work of individual Christians.

What is the authorized collective work of the local church?

2. Evangelism

How is evangelism the work of all Christians (individually)?

Must local churches (collectively) be teaching the Gospel? How are they authorized to accomplish this work?

3. Edification

How is edification the work of all Christians (individually)?

Must local churches (collectively) be involved in edification? How are they authorized to accomplish this work?

4. Benevolence

How is benevolence the work of all Christians (individually)?

Must local churches (collectively) be involved in benevolence? How are they authorized to accomplish this work?

5. Unauthorized Works

Are churches (even “churches of Christ”) involved in any unauthorized works? Why does this matter?

List some unauthorized works that churches engaged in.

Are these (and other) unauthorized works justifiable simply because they may seem to be “good” works? Explain.

Lesson 8: The Worship Of The Local Church

God is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. In John 4:23-24, Jesus said, “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Since God is seeking those who will worship Him, we need to be concerned with studying the subject of worship. Please notice that God is not seeking those who will worship Him in just *any* way they desire to worship Him. Rather, He is seeking those who will worship Him in *spirit* and in truth! Consider how Matthew 15:8-9 teaches that it is possible for our worship not to be pleasing to God: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

So, our worship must be “in spirit.” It must be done with the right attitude and focus. We must be focused on Him – not just going through the motions (as the passage in Matthew 15 demonstrated). Our worship must be fully engaging – from one spiritual being to the Supreme spiritual Being!

Then, our worship must also be according to truth. Notice again that Matthew 15 demonstrates

that our worship can be in “vain” when we are teaching as doctrines commandments of men rather than the things of God! So, the actions involved in our worship must also be pleasing to God. Consider that it is God who is able to dictate how He desires to be worshiped. It is not man’s role to decide how he wants to worship God. Rather, we must simply worship Him in a way that is keeping with the way of truth!

Now, as we think about the subject of “worship” in this lesson, it will prove to be beneficial to think about the meaning of the word itself. In both the Hebrew and Greek languages, the words that are most commonly translated “worship” have the ideas of bowing before and kissing toward. Thus, “worship” is an intentional act to express reverence and to praise/honor God. It is an intentional bowing of the heart before God. Worship, then, is direct and purposeful toward God – not indirect or accidental.

Certainly, worship is important both individually and collectively (as part of a local church). Again, God is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Individual Christians, then, should be dedicated to worshipping God. Local churches should also be dedicated to worshipping God together. This study will be specifically focused on the worship of the local church – and what God has prescribed concerning it.

There is a pattern concerning the worship of the local church (just as there has been concerning the organizational structure and work of the local church). The Bible tells us what acts (activities) that local churches are instructed to engage in – that constitute worship. We will be considering these “acts of worship” in our study today. Local churches today must follow the New Testament pattern (blueprint) in all areas (2 Timothy 1:13). However, please note that while we do read about New Testament churches using miraculous spiritual gifts in their assemblies (see 1 Corinthians 14), those gifts have ceased to exist (see 1 Corinthians 13:8-13). Still, there are other things written in the pages of Scripture concerning what the worship of the local church must consist of.

We want to focus our attention upon the things God has instructed local churches of Christ to be doing concerning their worship. Therefore, the purpose of this lesson is to go into the pages of the New Testament and discover what the Bible teaches about the worship of the local church.

Assemblies Of The Local Church

Where is the authority for a local church even to come together? What is the purpose of these assemblies? Let's consider.

Local churches assembled together

There were times in the New Testament when local churches assembled together. Notice the language in 1 Corinthians 14:23 and 26. Verse 23 says, "Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?" Verse 26 says, "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."

While these verses deal specifically in the context of an assembly of this local church in which spiritual gifts were being used (i.e. prophesy and tongue-speaking), Paul's instructions still demonstrate that this whole church would all come together in one place. This is an assembly of the local church in Corinth.

Inference would also help us to conclude the same thing concerning local churches assembling together in one place. For instance, Acts 20:7 shows an example of a church that had assembled together for the purpose of partaking of the Lord's Supper: "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." Notice, specifically, that this assembly of the local church was on the first day of the week.

Another inference concerning the assembly of the local church is in 1 Corinthians 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: 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." Again, here is a time reference to the first day of the week when this collecting was done. And, implied in the collecting together of these funds would be a

gathering together of individuals (namely the assembly of the local church in this context).

Also, notice Hebrews 10:24-25 to consider another inference to an assembly of a local church: "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 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." Clearly, there was an assembling together of Christians – if Christians were not to forsake that assembling together. Now, the only assembling together of Christians that would be mandatory would be the assembling together of the local church. It only makes sense that those who are part of local churches must be present for the assemblies of those churches.

Therefore, we can plainly see that the local churches were in the regular practice of assembling together. Specifically, we have seen two references to the local church assembling together on the first day of the week and involving themselves in two acts of worship that are specified to have taken place at that time (i.e. the Lord's Supper and the collection).

The purpose of these assemblies

The assemblies of the local church in the New Testament had a two-fold purpose that are in harmony with God's design for the local church. Today, the assemblies of the local church must continue to fulfill these two purposes.

(1) Worship. First, these assemblies were for the purpose of worshiping God. As we will see, God has prescribed five acts of worship that are to be accomplished in the setting of local church assemblies. Each one of the specific acts of worship engaged in by the local church served the purpose of worshiping God. For instance, Ephesians 5:19 says that when we sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs we make melody in our hearts "to the Lord." So, the primary focus of the assemblies of the local church is to praise and glorify God!

(2) Edification. Another purpose for the assemblies of the local church is concerning the edification of the church. Remember (from lesson 7) that edification is one of the God-given works for a local church to accomplish. The assemblies of the church is one of the main ways a local church can accomplish the work of edification. It should be a great encouragement for anyone who takes part in these worship services to know that they are not

alone in their desire and attempt to worship God! Look at 1 Corinthians 14:26 again: “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.” All things relative to the assemblies of the local church should be focused on spiritually building up others. That is Paul’s point in this passage. While this specifically addresses assemblies dealing with miraculous spiritual gifts being used, the general principle is applicable to every assembly of the local church!

Now, as you consider both of these functions of the assemblies of the local church, consider that they are both being accomplished simultaneously! Whenever a local church is focused on worshiping God in spirit and in truth, those who are present are also being spiritually strengthened in the faith. For instance, we saw how Ephesians 5:19 states that we are to make melody in our hearts to the Lord whenever we sing. Now, realize that Colossians 3:16 says that we teach and admonish one another through the signing of these psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs! Therefore, we don’t need to try to separate worship and edification. Instead, whenever we focus entirely on giving our worship to God in spirit and in truth, we will also be built up in the faith of the gospel!

The Five Acts Of Worship

At this point in our study (having established the authority for the local church to assemble together and the purpose of these assemblies), we now want to focus our attention directly upon the specific acts that constitute worship God has authorized the local church to engage in during these assemblies. Now, nowhere does the Bible directly label these five activities as “acts of worship.” However, they do meet the definition of worship (that we considered at the beginning of this lesson). Remember that we must always be interested in doing all things according to the authority of (in the name of) the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:17). Therefore, let’s look to God’s word and discover what the Bible truly teaches about the worship of the local church.

Gospel preaching

(1) Examples. First, consider some examples of gospel teaching/preaching being done in the assemblies of the local church.

Acts 20:7 records some things concerning Paul’s stay in Troas and his time with the church there: “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.” Along with the Lord’s Supper, one of the things accomplished in this assembly of the local church was Paul’s teaching. Now, consider the fact that the language in this passage indicates a formal discourse (not an informal conversation). So, Paul was speaking before the congregation on this occasion. I believe that implication would force us to conclude that he was speaking to them concerning the word of God!

Next, consider the assembly of the Corinthian church that is referenced in 1 Corinthians 14. We have already seen that 1 Corinthians 14 deals with times when the “whole church comes together in one place” (verse 23). Furthermore, we have also identified the use of spiritual gifts (i.e. tongue-speaking and prophecy) in this chapter and in these assemblies of the Corinthian congregation. Now, I want you to consider why spiritual gifts were even used in the assemblies of many first century churches. In the first century, spiritual gifts were temporarily provided by God (through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, see Acts 8:17-18) for the purpose of confirming the word that would be taught (see Hebrews 2:1-4 and Mark 16:19-20). After all, this was prior to the completion and wide distribution of the New Testament text. So, these spiritual gifts were temporarily used by God to demonstrate that the things being taught were words of truth. However, now that we have the perfect revelation, we are no longer in need of these miraculous spiritual gifts – and they have vanished away (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). Now, simply consider that public teaching of God’s word is being done in 1 Corinthians 14. Notice verse 26 again: “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” (emphasis mine, EMK).

As another example of public teaching in the assemblies, consider Paul’s statement to the

Colossians in Colossians 4:16: “Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.” These two letters were to be read in both of these congregations. Again, in this time the New Testament was being written, this was one way in which they could publicly teach God’s word (when the apostle Paul would write a letter to churches).

(2) How gospel preaching constitutes an act of worship. Clearly, New Testament congregations engaged in the public proclamation of God’s word in their assemblies. But, how does this constitute an act of worship in the local church?

The public teaching of God’s word in the assemblies causes all who are gathered together to focus on what God’s word teaches. Teaching God’s word focuses on who God is, what He has done for us, what He expects of us, and what He has prepared for those who obey/disobey Him. Certainly, it should be the great desire of everyone who has assembled to learn the teachings from God’s word in order to make the proper applications to his/her life and make any changes or improvements necessary. The noble attitude of the Bereans was such that they wanted to know the truth of God’s word – and they made their own diligent search of the Scriptures in order to see if they were being taught truth or not (see Acts 17:11).

As we assemble with local churches and hear the teaching of God’s word, we should all be focused on becoming more of what God desires us to be. Again, the focus is on God and learning and applying His will in order that we might please Him. So, as we hear God’s word, we listen with an attitude of self-evaluation in order that we might not be just hearers of God’s word, but doers of His word (James 1:22-25). God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness in His word (2 Peter 1:3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17) – and we should all be concerned with learning it and putting it to work in our lives! The assemblies of the local church helps us to focus on God in this way.

(3) Some notes. Consider a few additional facts about gospel preaching as an act of worship in the local church. First, the gospel’s message must not be changed or altered in any way. Galatians 1:6-9 (and other passages) condemns the practice of making any changes to the one true gospel of Jesus Christ. Second, Matthew 15:8-9 (quoted earlier)

demonstrates that teaching (or, by implication, listening to) the commandments of men (i.e. the doctrines and opinions made by man) as doctrines from God will cause your worship to be in vain (worthless). Third, the public teaching of God’s word necessarily implies that there are individuals who are listening to the teaching – and both are necessary elements to this act of worship. Fourth, the public gospel preaching that takes place in the worship assemblies of the local church will be led by men *only* (as we will discuss further later in this lesson, see 1 Timothy 2:11-12).

Giving

(1) Example. As we saw in lesson 7, there is one passage in the New Testament Scriptures that identifies how a local church raises funds to accomplish its God-given work. This is through a freewill offering of its members. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 is the only passage that gives instructions concerning when or how this is to be accomplished: “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 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.”

As was demonstrated earlier in this lesson, the necessary inference in the passage is that it concerns the assemblies of the local church (particularly notice the reference to the first day of the week). Also notice that the instructions given in this passage were not only given to the church in Corinth, but also to the churches of Galatia.

(2) How giving constitutes an act of worship. Having established that giving is a function of the assembly of the local church on the first day of the week for the purpose of raising funds to accomplish its God-given work, let’s also consider how this constitutes an act of worship.

Those who are involved in giving should focus on the blessings God has provided. Notice that the amount that is contributed to the local church should correspond with the amount that individual has prospered (1 Corinthians 16:2). Certainly God has provided the Christian with many blessings. In fact, every good thing that you have has come from God! James 1:17 says that every “good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation of shadow of turning.” Some of the blessings God has

provided us are spiritual (Ephesians 1:3) and some of the blessings are physical. Therefore, whenever we contribute to this collection of funds to accomplish the work of the local church, we should be focused on how God has prospered us and be thankful for it!

In addition, as you give financially in support of the work of the local church, you should consider that you are taking a financial part in the good works the local church is engaged in or will be engaged in collectively. Again, this collection is the only authorized means to fund the God-given work of the local church. Therefore, this work will only be accomplished through the cooperation of its members to contribute to the work (financially and otherwise). Each member, then, has the great opportunity and responsibility to do his/her part (see Ephesians 4:16). So, those who are willing to take part in this giving can focus on the work that the local church will be accomplishing with these funds – and how they will bring glory to God (by accomplishing the works identified in lesson 7).

(3) Some notes. Consider a few additional facts about giving as an act of worship in the local church. First, realize that this is the only New Testament passage on the subject of how a local church gains its funding (there is no authority for a church to gain funding by a bake sale, rummage sale, or any other kind of fundraising activity). Second, this collection is only to be taken up on the first day of the week (there is no collection authorized on any other day of the week). Third, this collection is a freewill offering of the members in accordance with the prosperity of each one (there is no required percentage or amount). Fourth, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 gives additional detail concerning the attitudes and some additional principles for the collection – including the fact that God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The Lord's Supper

(1) Examples. Consider some examples of the Lord's Supper being instituted and being observed in the assemblies of the local church.

Matthew 26:26-29 records Jesus' instructions to His disciples regarding the institution of the Lord's Supper: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the

new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.'" Therefore, upon the commandment of the Lord, His people must partake of this supper in memory of Him – using the two elements identified in this text.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 also provides instructions concerning the Lord's Supper. Primarily, Paul is attempting to correct perversions that had been made to the Lord's Supper in Corinth. They had, apparently, perverted the nature of the Lord's Supper into a common meal – and Paul was giving this church instructions concerning properly partaking of it. Particularly, he reminds them of the words of Jesus when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper – in verses 23-26.

As we noticed earlier regarding the teaching of God's word, Acts 20:7 records an example of the church in Troas assembling together and partaking of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week: "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." Specifically note the phrase "break bread." This phrase is used in Scripture to identify both common meals and the Lord's Supper (see how Jesus used the phrase in Matthew 26:26-29). The context of the whole church assembling together on the first day of the week would indicate that the phrase is being used in this verse to clearly identify the Lord's Supper.

(2) How the Lord's Supper constitutes an act of worship. Having identified that Jesus' disciples are expected to partake of the Lord's Supper and did partake of the Lord's Supper in the assemblies of the church on the first day of the week, consider how this constitutes an act of worship.

Partaking of the Lord's Supper is designed to cause everyone who is partaking to focus on the price that was paid for their salvation. The Lord's Supper is a spiritual supper to remember the sufferings, death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore Jesus said to "do this in remembrance of Me" (1 Corinthians 11:24, 25). It is, then, a time to reflect upon the great love God has demonstrated for mankind (and for you personally) to send His Son to die on the cross and for Jesus to willingly give His life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world (and for you personally). It is a time

to consider all that Jesus Christ endured so that we could be saved eternally from our sins!

Partaking of the Lord's Supper also provides us with the opportunity for inward reflection. According to 1 Corinthians 11:27-28, there is to be an examination with regard to how we are partaking of the Lord's Supper. Certainly, we want to be sure that we are partaking of it in a way that is worthy of the Lord. While the specific examination in this passage probably referred to the specific way the Corinthians had corrupted the Lord's Supper, taking of the Lord's Supper and considering the great price paid for our salvation should also cause us to consider whether we are living our lives in a way that is right with God or not. We should reflect upon our lives to see if we have truly given our lives to the one who gave His life for us (2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Galatians 2:20) or if God's grace has been shown to us in vain (1 Corinthians 15:10). This will help us to make the proper changes and live as better servants of the Lord!

(3) Some notes. Consider a few additional facts about the Lord's Supper as an act of worship in the local church. First, the Lord's Supper is to be taken in a worthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:27-28). The Lord's Supper is not a common meal (as the Corinthians seemed to have changed the Lord's Supper into). Notice what is said in 1 Corinthians 11:20-22, 34. Second, the Lord's Supper is to be taken on the first day of every week. The Lord's Supper is not just to be observed once per year/month/etc. It is to be observed weekly by those who are able (Acts 20:7). Also, there is no other day authorized for the Lord's Supper besides the first day of the week. Third, the Lord's Supper contains only two elements (as seen in Matthew 26:26-29): The unleavened bread (established by the fact that is the type of bread Jesus would have been eating for Passover) – representing Christ's broken body; and, the fruit of the vine – representing the blood of Christ (the blood of the new covenant).

Prayer

(1) Examples. Consider some examples of prayer being offered in the assemblies of the local church.

1 Corinthians 14:15 (remember that 1 Corinthians 14 deals with times the whole church

assembles together in one place – verse 23 and 26) says, "What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding."

Acts 12 also provides some points to consider concerning this. Verse 5 states that Peter was kept in prison and "constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church." Though this passage does not necessarily mean that the church was assembled together when it was praying for him, verse 12 does help to see that "many were gathered together praying" for Peter at Mary's house (perhaps this was when the church assembled together for worship).

Furthermore, Acts 4:23-30 at least records another example of prayer being offered when Christians come together. The context specifies that Peter and John went to "their own companions" (after being threatened for preaching Jesus to the people) and prayed together. Now, "their own companions" could refer to the church in Jerusalem – or it could simply refer to the other apostles.

(2) How prayer constitutes an act of worship. Other examples also continue to demonstrate the same point that that Christians prayed frequently (1 Thessalonians 5:17) – and prayed together. Specifically, 1 Corinthians 14:15 helps us to see that this was even done when local churches assembled together. Having identified these things, let's now consider how prayer constitutes an act of worship in the local church.

Prayer addresses God with our cares and concerns. Prayer reminds us that we are the children of God and that He is our Almighty Father who cares for us. Therefore, prayer reminds us of the great care of God and the fact that He invites us to cast all of our cares and worries upon Him (see 1 Peter 5:7 and Philippians 4:6-7).

Prayer is an avenue through which we can directly praise God. It is an avenue for expressing our thanksgiving to God and for praising God for all that He is and all that He has done for us! The psalms of David are particularly helpful to see inspired examples of praise being offered to God in prayer!

Prayer is also the avenue through which God tells Christians who have sinned to find forgiveness of their sins. In addition to repentance, Acts 8:22 and 1 John 1:8-2:2 demonstrate that we must confess our sin to God and ask Him for forgiveness through

prayer. Thus, we are reminded of the fact that our salvation is dependent upon God (see an example concerning David in Psalm 51).

(3) Some notes. Consider a few additional facts about prayer as an act of worship in the local church. First, remember that prayer is a tremendous blessing that is full of power that has been made available by God to the Christian (James 5:16). Second, consider the blessing of joining in prayer with brothers and sisters in Christ. Third, our prayers are to be offered/addressed to the Father (i.e. Matthew 6:9). Fourth, our prayers are offered through the name of Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Advocate with the Father (Colossians 3:17; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 2:1-2). Fifth, our prayers must be offered in faith in order to be effective (James 1:5-8).

Singing

(1) Examples. Consider some examples concerning the place for singing in the worship of the local church.

1 Corinthians 14:15 (in the same context we have discussed previously) says, “What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.”

Ephesians 5:19 (notice the “one another” aspect of this passage – which would apply to the singing in the assemblies of the local church) says, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”

Similarly, Colossians 3:16 says, “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.”

(2) How singing constitutes an act of worship. This is just a sample of New Testament passages specifying the type of music that we use to worship God (vocal music). But, how does singing constitute an act of worship to God?

Some of the songs that are sung are directly sung to praise God. Some songs focus on praising Him for the things He has done (i.e. His love, mercy, and grace demonstrated through Jesus Christ). Some songs focus our minds on His nature (i.e. His holiness, power, etc.). All of these songs are

beneficial to focus our minds directly upon God and praise Him accordingly!

Some songs teach and warn us concerning spiritual truths God has revealed. Colossians 3:16 demonstrated that this is one of the benefits of singing these psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Some songs remind us of Bible passages and Bible truths that we need to consider and apply to our lives. Some songs teach us truths from God’s word we may have never considered before. Some songs directly warn us about things we need to be preparing for (i.e. our deaths, the Judgment Day, etc.). All of these spiritual songs are beneficial to focus our minds directly upon truths God has revealed in His word and to encourage and warn us to live our lives accordingly!

(3) Some notes. Consider a few additional facts about singing as an act of worship in the local church. First, all of the passages in the New Testament (the law we live under today) on the subject of how we are to worship God show the action of singing – never playing a mechanical instrument of music (read Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:30; Acts 16:25; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; Hebrews 13:15; James 5:13). Second, the only instrument that is to be used is specified in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 – the heart! Third, there is *zero* authority to use a mechanical instrument in worship to God (either in public or private worship)! The Scriptures are silent with regard to such – and we must not violate the silence of the Scriptures. Fourth, the songs we are authorized to sing are psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs – not secular or popular culture songs.

Important Principles Related To The Worship Of The Local Church

Having established some things God has said about the worship of the local church, let’s also consider some important principles related to the worship and assemblies of the local church so that we can make sure that we are pleasing to God in this area. Consider 5 principles with me.

Prepare for true worship

Think back to the things we discussed in the introduction to this lesson. God wants us to worship Him. He is seeking true worshipers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Also, remember that worship (by its very nature) does not just happen by chance. Instead, it is a purposeful thing!

Therefore, we should all desire to prepare ourselves to worship God in the way He is seeking to be worshipped in. We would do well, then, to give consideration to our worship before we actually begin worshiping. Here are some suggestions. (1) Clear your mind of worldly things. (2) Be rested and alert (if possible). (3) Consider the significance of your worship – before you worship. (4) Prepare both your body and your mind to be as reverent to God as possible. (5) Work to eliminate as many distractions as possible.

Attend

One of the most basic and fundamental responsibilities of Christians who are members of local churches is to attend all the assemblies of the local church you are capable of attending. In fact, Hebrews 10:24-25 directly identifies that it is sinful to willingly absent yourself from these assemblies, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 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.”

Consider what it says about you and your desire to worship and serve God if you willfully forsake/neglect *any* of the assemblies of the local church! Consider what it tells God about you (though He already knows your heart). Consider what it tells your brethren. Consider what it tells others who are around you (who may not even be Christians). Realize that if you know that you should assemble with the local church – and choose not to, you sin (James 4:17)!

Worship in spirit and truth

You must not consider yourself as a “spectator” at a public worship service! The purpose of the assemblies of the local church is not for your entertainment! Instead, true worship will involve your active participation. Again, John 4:23-24

demonstrates that God is seeking true worshipers who will worship Him in spirit (a heartfelt and sincere way) and in truth (according to the truth He has revealed)!

Therefore, you should be focusing on the gospel teaching, on the importance of the collection and the blessings you have been given, on the meaning of the Lord’s Supper, on the words of the prayers, and on the words of the songs (and singing along, if possible). Furthermore, if you are participating in the worship, you will not be a distraction to others who are trying to worship God.

Observe the God-given gender roles

Although every Christian (male and female) should be participating in the worship assemblies (as we’ve just seen), God has defined some specific gender roles which must be observed. Consider the following two passages.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35: “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.” Remember that 1 Corinthians 14 deals with the context of the whole church assembling together (verses 23 and 26). In this setting (i.e. in the assemblies of the church), then, women were forbidden to speak (although women are permitted to sing along with the entire congregation – as seen from the passages we’ve consider about singing).

1 Timothy 2:11-14: “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” A woman’s role is clearly limited in this passage to a role of submission to men. She is not permitted to teach or to have authority over a man. Rather, she is to be quiet. Paul then explains the two reasons why this is so: (1) Because Adam was formed first, then Eve; and (2) Because Eve was the first to be deceived.

Consider, then, some conclusions and applications from these passages to the assemblies of local churches. (1) Women cannot take leading roles in the assemblies of the local church – like public teaching before the whole congregation. (2) None of God’s instructions or reasoning is limited to the

specific time in which Paul was writing. We must not allow our culture to cause us to change what Paul has said. God gave His reasoning in 1 Timothy 2:13-14 – as well as His commandments in the passages we’ve considered.

Do things decently and orderly

Finally, understand that God wants the worship assemblies of the local church to be orderly. He does not want chaos and confusion. This is why Paul presented all of the instructions in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40! He wants people to realize that God is “not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Therefore, Paul simply told the Corinthians, “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). He wants people to focus on the spiritual activities He has prescribed (as we’ve been discussing throughout this lesson) instead of being confused by chaotic activity! This same principle is true for local church assemblies today as well.

Conclusion

What a wonderful opportunity we have: To come together as God’s people (as members of a local church) and worship our Creator, Lord, and Savior! We are truly blessed to be part of Jesus’ church – which He has purchased with His own blood. Therefore, let us seek to do everything by the authority of Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17) – including in the way we worship Him!

As we close this series of lessons, I hope that you have a better understanding of the church of Christ you can read about in the Bible. I hope you are determined to be part of Jesus’ one true church (in the universal sense) and that you will be part of a local church of Christ that follows the Bible pattern in all areas. Then, I hope you will faithfully serve the Lord every day as a member of His body – and contribute your part! Always remember to seek Bible authority in every area that you might help the church give glory to Jesus Christ!

Ephesians 3:20-21 says, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

Study Questions

What does John 4:23-24 say about our worship?

What is worship?

1. Assemblies Of The Local Church

Is there authority for local churches to assemble together? Give specific examples.

What was the purpose of these assemblies?

2. The Five Acts Of Worship

Discuss the act of Gospel preaching as worship.

Discuss the act of giving as worship.

Discuss the act of the Lord’s Supper as worship.

Discuss the act of prayer as worship.

Discuss the act of singing as worship.

3. Important Principles Related To The Worship Of The Local Church

Discuss the following principles related to the worship of the local church:

1. Prepare for true worship –

2. Attend –

3. Worship in spirit and truth –

4. Observe the God-given gender roles –

5. Do things decently and orderly –