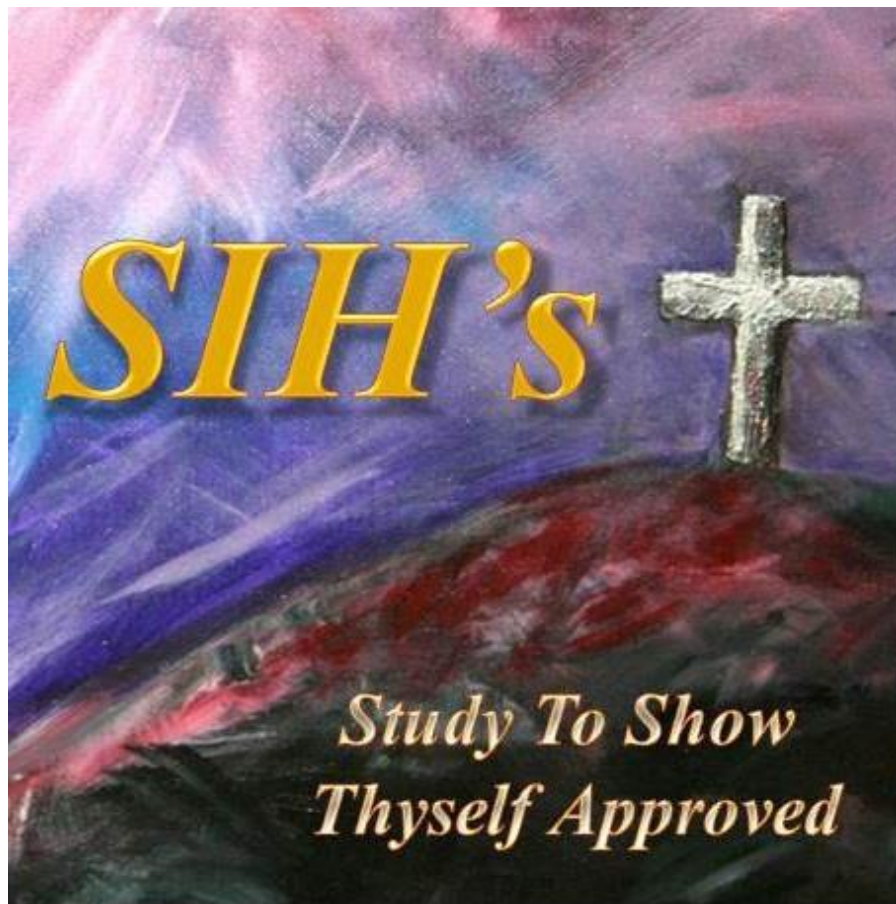


**Settled In Heaven's**

# **The Importance Of The Local Church**



**Robert Barkman**

**Copyright 2013**

**Settled In Heaven Ministries  
Robert R Barkman**

**All Rights Reserved**

**This publication may be freely distributed without charge to the recipient along with this acknowledgment. Distribution for the monetary gain of the distributor is prohibited without prior consent from Robert Barkman**

# Table of Contents

The Nature Of The Local Assembly .....	2
“The Nature Of The Church: A Local, Visible, Called-Out Assembly” .....	3
“The Nature Of The Church: An Assembly’s Benefits For The Saved” .....	7
“The Nature Of The Church: The Existence of The Assembly” .....	11
“The Foundation Of The Church: Christ and His Word” .....	15
The Mission Of The Local Assembly .....	19
“The Mission Of The Church: The Great Commission” .....	20
“The Mission Of The Church: Evangelize The Lost” .....	24
“The Mission Of The Church: The Ordinances of Baptism and Lord’s Supper.....	28
“The Mission Of The Church: To Instruct It’s Members” .....	33
Other Truths About The Assembly.....	37
“The Blessings Of Church Membership” .....	38
“The Accrediting Of The Assembly” .....	41
“The Membership and Attendance Of The Assembly” .....	45
“The Metaphors Describing The Assembly” .....	50
Summary Of This Study .....	55
“Summary Of Our Study” .....	56
Addendum: The Church Universal, Local, Or Both?.....	59
“The Church: Universal, Local, Or Both?” .....	60

# **The Nature Of The Local Assembly**

## The Importance Of The Local Church -1

# ***"The Nature Of The Church: A Local, Visible, Called-Out Assembly"***

**"...The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)**

As we begin our study of the importance of the Lord's local assemblies. It is vital that we understand what we mean by the title "the Lord's church". In this first installment of our study, we will be examining the words translated "church" in the KJV Bible to come to a definition of "the Lord's church".

### **THE STUDY:**

To begin our study of the Lord's church it is important that we understand the meaning of the word "church" as found in the KJV of the Holy Bible.

The word "church" is not found in the Old Testament Scriptures. However, it is found over 100 times in the New Testament and, every time, is translated from the Greek word "ekklesia".

### **The usage of "Ekklesia"**

"Ekklesia" is translated into English using the terms "church" or "assembly". The word is used in several differing contexts with one basic similarity. "Ekklesia" always refers to a visible assembly of people. The different assemblies described by the term "ekklesia" (with one example of each usage) are:

#### **1. A political assembly of people in Acts 19:32,39,41;**

*31) And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring [him] that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. 32) Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the **assembly** was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. 33) And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. 34) But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great [is] Diana of the Ephesians. 35) And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, [Ye] men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the [image] which fell down from Jupiter? 36) Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. 37) For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your*

goddess. **38)** Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. **39)** But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful **assembly**. **40)** For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. **41)** And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the **assembly**. (Acts 19:31-41)

## **2. The physical nation of Israel in the wilderness in the OT in Acts 7:38;**

**37)** This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. **38)** This is he, that was in the **church** in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and [with] our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: **39)** To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust [him] from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, **40)** Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for [as for] this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. **41)** And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. (Acts 7:37-41)

## **3. Local assemblies of worship on earth – Acts 8:1,3;**

**1)** And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the **church** which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. **2)** And devout men carried Stephen [to his burial], and made great lamentation over him. **3)** As for Saul, he made havock of the **church**, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed [them] to prison. (Acts 8:1-3)

## **4. The assembly of saints gathered in Heavenly Jerusalem throughout eternity – Hebs 12:23**

**22)** But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, **23)** To the general assembly and **church** of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, **24)** And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than [that of] Abel. (Hebrews 12:22-24)

By seeing the contextual usage of "ekklesia" we can see that IT ALWAYS SPEAKS OF A LOCAL, VISIBLE ASSEMBLY (more on this in later sections of our study).

1. As a local assembly, the church was created to especially minister to those who are around us. It is local in nature, each one established in a different area of the globe to minister to those in their geographic area.

**46)** And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: **47)** And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **48)** And ye are witnesses of these things. **49)** And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. **50)** And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. **51)** And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

*(Luke 24:46-51)*

2. As a visible assembly, we can see that the Lord's church was formed to be a public, visible display of His love, care and grace towards those in that local community. The community would be watching the church as an assembly and individual members to see if they "practiced what they preached".

**10)** Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for [your] food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) **11)** Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God. **12)** For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; **13)** Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for [your] liberal distribution unto them, and unto all [men]; **14)** And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. **15)** Thanks [be] unto God for his unspeakable gift.

*(2 Corinthians 9:10-15)*

**31)** Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. **32)** Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: **33)** Even as I please all [men] in all [things], not seeking mine own profit, but the [profit] of many, that they may be saved.

*(1 Corinthians 10:31-33)*

The testimony of a local church is so important, the Lord has given clear instructions for disciplining those who are members of His assembly that are living in habitual sin....

**15)** Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. **16)** But if he will not hear [thee, then] take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. **17)** And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell [it] unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

*(Matthew 18:15-17)*

## The of definition of "ekklesia"

The Greek word "ekklesia" contains two basic parts:

1. The first part is the prefix "ek" which means "from" or "out of".
2. The second part is the root word "kaleo" which means "to call", "to summon", "to urge", or "to incite"

The definition of "ekklesia" teaches us that the church is a group that has been "summoned out" or an assembly that has been "called out".

This calling out from the world is a call to holiness. Our Lord's church should be a holy body that is dedicated to glorifying God through submission to His ways and declaration of His truths...

*13) Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. 14) Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. 15) Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. 16) Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*  
(Matthew 5:13-16)

Putting the principles of the usage and definition of "ekklesia" together, we can see that:

The church of the Lord is A LOCAL, VISIBLE ASSEMBLY OF SAINTS THAT HAS BEEN SUMMONED BY GOD, MAKING IT UNIQUE FROM ALL OTHERS ASSEMBLIES IN THIS WORLD.

Its uniqueness is displayed in four ways: its founding, its purpose, its benefits and its accreditation. We will be looking at all four of these areas of uniqueness in later segments of our study.

### **THE SUMMARY:**

Based on our studies so far we can see that the nature of the Lord's church includes:

1. An assembly of individuals
2. A local assembly – created to especially minister to those around us
3. A visible assembly – created to be holy and present Christ to those around us
4. A called our assembly
5. A unique assembly

Why should we should attend, join and support the ministries of a local church? It is a local, visible assembly that is personally called out by God. This call of separation by God emphasizes its spiritual importance and distinction over all other organizations on earth.

**May the Lord bless us as we seek His truth.**



## The Importance Of The Local Church -2

### ***"The Nature Of The Church: An Assembly's Benefits For The Saved"***

**"...The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)**

In this second lesson of our study on the Lord's church, we will begin looking at the church's triune role in the lives of those who have been saved by God's grace by supplying care, the opportunity to serve, fellowship, and encouragement.

#### **THE STUDY:**

In our previous study we found that the Lord's churches on earth can be defined as "A LOCAL, VISIBLE ASSEMBLY OF SAINTS THAT HAS BEEN SUMMONED BY GOD, MAKING IT UNIQUE FROM ALL OTHERS ASSEMBLIES IN THIS WORLD."

As our study continued, we saw that the church, being a local body, helped us to understand that it was established to minister, first and foremost, in the local area in which it is situated. Then we also learned that because the churches of the Lord are visible, they were meant to be a public, visible display of His love, care and grace towards those in that local community.

In today's study we will be looking at the church's characteristic of being an "assembly of saints". Please note that the Lord's church is a group that is made up of individual members that have trusted in Christ as their Lord and Savior, and have professed this faith publically through the ordinance of baptism.

***41) Then they that **gladly received his word** were **baptized**: and the same day there were **added [unto them] about three thousand souls.** 42) And they continued stedfastly in **the apostles' doctrine** and **fellowship**, and in **breaking of bread**, and in **prayers**.***

*(Acts 2:41-42)*

Please notice in the above text, we find a clear order to events that result in church membership...

1. The people "gladly received the word", this is the acceptance of the truths of the gospel message resulting in belief in Christ as Lord and Savior.
2. They "were baptized", following their salvation they were in submission to the will of God by publically confessing their faith by being baptized.

3. Following their baptism, we find them uniting with the local assembly “added unto them about three thousand souls”

4. Their newly experienced church membership resulted in them being taught “they continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine”; enjoying fellowship with their brothers and sisters in Christ “fellowship”; communal worship enhanced through the observance of the Lord’s supper “in breaking of bread” and joint prayers “prayers” .

Using this as the basic outline of our study, let’s begin looking at the church’s benefits that are offered to the saints of God:

## 1. The Teaching Of God’s Word: Ephesians 4:11-16

*11) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12) For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13) Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14) That we [henceforth] be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, [and] cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15) But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, [even] Christ: 16) From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*

*(Ephesians 4:11-16)*

The Lord gifted the men found in verse 11 to reveal the Word to believers through the ministry of His churches. The apostles were inspired to reveal the NT scriptures. The prophets were inspired to reveal the OT words of God. Once the OT and NT were completed, the ministry of these offices were brought to an end. Now the Lord uses evangelists (missionaries), pastors, and other teachers of the Word to teach the completed Scriptures to those who are members of His assembly.

The purpose of all of these men’s ministries is to teach His Word in an understandable fashion so the members of His church so that they can become mature Christians, equipped for service and able to discern true teaching from error.

## 2. Fellowship and opportunities of service for Christ: 1 Corinthians 12:20-31

*18) But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. 19) And if they were all one member, where [were] the body? 20) But now [are they] many members, yet but one body. 21) And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. 22) Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: 23) And those [members] of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely [parts] have more abundant comeliness. 24) For our comely [parts] have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that [part] which lacked: 25) That there should be no schism in the body; but [that] the members should have the same care one for another. 26) And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or*

*one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. 27) Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. 28) And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. 29) [Are] all apostles? [are] all prophets? [are] all teachers? [are] all workers of miracles? 30) Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? 31) But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.*

*(1 Corinthians 12:18-31)*

Please notice the opportunities to serve the Lord in His assemblies are implied throughout this passage. All the opportunities that open to us to support, help and share in the lives of other church members. All of these are opportunities of service to Christ.

The offices of service mentioned in verses 28-31 were given to the local assemblies to reveal God's Word and accredit the church and her message. These offices no longer exist in the local assembly to day, as they came to an end at the completion of the revelation of His Word to man in approximately 100 AD. (more on this later in our study)

### 3. Enriched Communal Worship: Ordinances (Baptism, Lord's Supper) and Enhanced Prayer

#### Baptism

*18) And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19) Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20) Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)*

The ordinance of baptism is given to the local church as a part of the great commission.

#### Lord's Supper

*23) For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the [same] night in which he was betrayed took bread: 24) And when he had given thanks, he brake [it], and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 25) After the same manner also [he took] the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink [it], in remembrance of me. 26) For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. 27) Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink [this] cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28) But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of [that] bread, and drink of [that] cup. 29) For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 30) For this cause many [are] weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. 31) For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. 32) But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. 33) Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. 34) And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come. (1 Corinthians 11:23-34)*

The responsibility of observing the Lord's Supper is expounded by the Apostle Paul to the local church at Corinth.

## Prayer

*15) Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16) But if he will not hear [thee, then] take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17) And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell [it] unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. 18) Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19) Again I say unto you, **That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.** 20) For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

*(Matthew 18:15-20)*

In the context of church discipline and local church authority, we are told that no matter how small an assembly of believers, when they are gathered and in prayer making requests according to His will great things can take place and Christ is in their midst.

### **THE SUMMARY:**

Based on our studies so far we can see that the nature of the Lord's church includes:

1. An assembly of individuals
2. A local assembly
3. A visible assembly
4. A called our assembly
5. A unique assembly

In the second part of our study we saw that the church, as an assembly offers to Christians the three-fold blessing of:

1. the teaching of God's Word – to strengthen, mature and ground them.
2. the care and fellowship of other believers
3. opportunities of service to Christ.
4. enriched worship of the Lord through the observance of the ordinances and enhanced prayer effectiveness.

Why should we should attend, join and support the ministries of a local church? I supplies to us the teachings of God's Word, fellowship with believers and enriched worship.

**May the Lord bless us as we seek His truth.**

## The Importance Of The Local Church -3

# ***"The Nature Of The Church: The Existence of The Assembly"***

**"...The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)**

In this third lesson of our study on the Lord's church, we will begin looking at the church's promised span and purpose of existence in this sin darkened world.

### **THE STUDY:**

Our Lord has clearly shown us the "lifespan" of His local assemblies on earth...

1. The Lord's church began with the call of His disciples to form an assembly of followers: 1 Corinthians 12:27-31, Mark 3:13-19, Luke 6:12-20

*"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And **God hath set some in the church, first apostles**, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. [Are] all apostles? [are] all prophets? [are] all teachers? [are] all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way." (1 Corinthians 12:27-31)*

Here, we are told that the first members of that the Lord called into His assembly were His apostles. In the beginning times of the Jerusalem assembly, you have the Lord as the Pastor/Teacher of the assembly with the other apostles making up the membership of the church. The only other office that was existing in the beginning days of the church was the office of Treasurer into which Judas was placed (John 13:29).

Keep in mind, all of the Apostles, as well as Christ Himself, had been baptized by John the Baptist. This baptism followed the apostles' fruits of repentance and made them eligible to obtain church membership (Mark 1:4). This is one aspect of John the Baptist's ministry of which it was said that he was to "prepare the way of the Lord" (Mark 1:2), by making them eligible for membership in the Lord's first assembly on earth.

The actual beginning of the Lord's church is described for us in detail in two passages that describe the same historical event..

*"And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth [unto him] whom he would: and they came unto him. **And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him**, and that he might send them forth to preach, And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils: And Simon he surnamed Peter; 17) And James the [son] of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder: And Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the [son] of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Canaanite, And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him: and they went into an house." (Mark 3:13-19)*

In these verses, we can see that the Lord chose these original twelve apostles to fulfill specific duties, one of which was to BE WITH HIM. In other words, they were chosen to accompany Him and be pastored by Him. Christ fulfilled His role of pastor to them as He led them, taught them, and protected them. All of this was done to prepare them for their future, permanent, ministries that would begin at Pentecost (the EMPOWERING of the local assembly for ministry in Christ's absence by the Holy Spirit) (Acts 2:1-36).

*"And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. **And when it was day, he called [unto him] his disciples:** and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the [son] of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas [the brother] of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor. And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed [them] all. **And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples,** and said, Blessed [be ye] poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. (Luke 6:12-20)*

The Lord began His church by choosing, and assembling His apostles (here they are called "his disciples"), who are separated from the crowds that had gathered. Then they rejoined the crowds and ministered to them.

Following their ministry to the crowds, the LORD BEGAN TO TEACH HIS CHURCH (ie His disciples) as He shared with them the Sermon on the Mount. This is clearly seen by Him looking directly on His disciples as He taught. In other words, when the Lord taught the Sermon on the Mount, He was teaching His disciples (ie His church, His apostles) as the crowds looked on.

## 2. The Lord's church will continue to exist on earth until He comes back at His second coming: Matthew 16:16-20, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Corinthians 11:25-26

*"And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed [it] unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; **and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.** And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ." (Matthew 16:16-20)*

In the above text we can see that the Lord is making a clear promise that the His church will not be overcome, die a slow death and go out of existence. Not Satan, not the powers of darkness, NOTHING will gain a lasting complete victory over all of His assemblies on earth. Individual church assemblies may come and go, but there will always be at least one of the Lord's churches in existence to minister to His people and the lost world around it.

Also note the phrase "will build". This phrase is translated from a Greek word that means "to strengthen", "to edify", "to add to". This is teaching us that, at the time Jesus spoke this, the church was already in existence and He is promising He would strengthen it, prepare it and "build it up" to be able to exist until His second coming.

He did this in many ways... His personal teaching during His earthly ministry, His completion and accreditation of the inspired Word and ministry of the church of God by 100 AD, the giving of the Holy Spirit to empower His assembly at Pentecost, the establishing of other offices that would be used to further "build up" the

assembly, the adding of believers to the first assembly at Jerusalem and the sending of the gospel to (and establishing His churches) throughout the Gentile world. All of these strengthened the Lord's assemblies which enabled them to exist in His absence and in the face of all types of opposition.

(There will be much more about the "rock" being mentioned in this text in the next section of our study. For now, the only important point to be seen is that the church will not die and go out of existence.)

The Lord also explains the event that will cause His churches to go out of existence... it would not be the opposition of the powers of darkness, but the end of the current age. This will take place at His second coming....

*"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, **lo, I am with you alway, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen.**" (Matthew 28:18-20)*

A part of the Great Commission that the Lord delivered to His local assembly was the promise of His continuing accompaniment with His churches until the "end of the world". The term "world" was translated from a Greek word that means "age" or "specific time period" or "period of duration". This is teaching us that the second coming of Christ, which will bring about the end of the current age in which we are living, will also bring an end to the existence of the Lord's churches on earth.

This same principle is also supported in 1 Corinthians 11:25-26...

*"After the same manner also [he took] the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink [it], in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death **till he come.**" (1 Corinthians 11:25-26)*

The ordinance of the Lord's supper is a church ordinance, therefore, it is under local church authority and is to be observed, and controlled by His local assemblies. Here, we are told that His churches are to be observing His supper consistently until He comes back. For His churches to be able to keep this command, His churches must be in existence until His second coming.

The Lord's church, which started with Christ's call to assemble given to His Apostles, will exist until the second coming of Christ.

## **THE SUMMARY:**

Based on our studies so far we can see that the nature of the Lord's church includes:

1. An assembly of individuals
2. A local assembly
3. A visible assembly
4. A called our assembly
5. A unique assembly

In the second part of our study we saw that the church, as an assembly offers to Christians the three-fold blessing of:

1. the teaching of God's Word – to strengthen, mature and ground them.
2. the care and fellowship of other believers
3. opportunities of service to Christ.
4. enriched worship of the Lord through the observance of the ordinances and enhanced prayer effectiveness.

In the third, and last part of our study on the Nature of the Church, we can see that:

1. The Lord's church began with Christ's call for His Apostles to assemble and to accompany Him.
2. The Lord's church would go out of existence during the age in which we live
3. The Lord's church will not be overcome by the powers of darkness in this world
4. The Lord's church will cease to exist at the end of this age, brought about by the second coming of Jesus.

Why should we should attend, join and support the ministries of a local church? It is promised to remain in existence until Christ comes again, therefore it can be a consistent source of instruction, fellowship, worship and opportunities of service as we live our lives on earth.

**May the Lord bless us as we seek His truth.**



## The Importance Of The Local Church -4

### ***"The Foundation Of The Church: Christ and His Word"***

**"...The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)**

In this fourth lesson of our study on the Lord's church, we will be looking at the church's foundation. In other words, we will be studying the basis and underpinnings of the Lord's churches on earth.

#### **THE STUDY:**

#### **Christ and His Word Make Up the Foundation of the Local Assembly...**

1. Christ is called the Foundation with the Ministry Of The Word Building Upon That Foundation : 1 Corinthians 3:9-15

*"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, [ye are] God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, **I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon.** But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For **other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.** Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."* (1 Corinthians 3:9-15)

In this text, we can see that Paul is describing his teaching ministry to the Lord's churches as "I have laid the foundation". He continues by describing the teaching of those who teach the assemblies after his departure as "and another buildeth thereon". By using these descriptive phrases Paul is making it plain for us to see that the teaching the truths of Christ make up the foundation and mission of the Lord's churches.

He then goes further and states that "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." By saying this, he is making it plain that the foundation of the Lord's churches are made up EXCLUSIVELY of the teachings concerning Christ. The teachings of this world, no matter how popular or persuasive they might be are not a part of the underpinnings, strength, and establishment of the churches of the Lord.

These principles are further supported by 1 Timothy 3:15 which tells us that the church of God is the "pillar and ground of the truth".

Paul then explains that the teachings that honor Christ are very valuable and will reap eternal blessings for the teacher; while the teachings that depart from God's Word are of no lasting value and will not bring about eternal gain.

## 2. Christ is called the "Chief Cornerstone" with the Word Being Called The Foundation : Ephesians 2:19-22

*"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are **built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner [stone];** In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."* (Ephesians 2:19-22)

In these verses, Paul reveals to us that "the household of God" (ie the local church assembly) is built upon the foundation of the Word of God. He uses the phrase "the apostles and prophets" to refer to the New and the Old Testaments. Those who held the office of apostle were the authors of the vast majority of the New Testament. Likewise, those holding the office of prophet wrote the vast majority of the Old Testament.

What is the dominating, exclusive theme of both the Old and New Testament Scriptures? It is the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why He is described as the "chief corner stone". What is the a chief corner stone. Basically, it is the foundation of the foundation. The cornerstone is set and then the other stones making up the foundation are placed in alignment with it.

## 3. The Truths Of Christ Found In The Word Are Called "The Rock" Upon Which The Local Church Is Built: Matthew 16:13-20

*"When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, **Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?** And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, **But whom say ye that I am?** And Simon Peter answered and said, **Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.** And Jesus answered and said unto him, **Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.**"*

Please note the series of events that take place in this text:

1. Christ asks his disciples... how does the common Jewish citizen identify Him?

*"When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"*

2. The response they give ... there is no certainty and much disagreement on their part... perhaps John the Baptist, perhaps the OT prophet Elijah or Jeremiah, or another prophet.

*And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.*

3. Christ's second question... How do my disciples identify me?

*He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?"*

4. Peter replies .... Thou art the Christ (Anointed One, One Sent From God) the Son of the living God.

*And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

5. The Lord responds by explaining that, to understand these truths about Christ Peter has been greatly blessed with enabling by God.

*And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*

6. The Lord continues by stating that Peter's description of Christ is the rock (cornerstone) that the Lord's church will be empowered, strengthened and established. It would be through the teachings of these truths about Christ that the church would be invincible.

*And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

(In this verse, note the play on the word "rock". The word "rock" is used to describe the truths that Peter has just spoken, Christ was affirming these truths as the foundational truths of His local assembly.

Please notice that Christ gives the title of "Peter" to Simon in response to the statement that Simon has just made. "Peter" is the English translation of a Greek word that means "a small piece of a rock". Why does Christ give Peter this title? He is saying that Peter, as he declares the truth about Christ is adding to the foundation becoming a small part of it. This is in perfect alignment with what Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 (above). Anyone who proclaims Christ in a local assembly is adding a small piece of rock to the large rock that is the church's foundation. This is what Peter had just done proclaiming these truths about Christ in the midst of the local church at Jerusalem.

7. The Lord continues His discourse to all the assembled disciples telling them that, as a local church assembly, they have a tremendous amount of authority as they proclaim truths about Christ to the world.

These truths if accepted by faith, will give access to the kingdom of heaven.

*And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven:*

As the church warns others of their bondage in sin and coming eternal judgment (binding the hearers on earth); God in heaven will "back up their message" and bring this judgment to pass. (binding the hearers in heaven).

*and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven:*

Likewise, as the church promises those who believe the church's message of Christ will be released from their sin bondage and enter into spiritual, eternal life (loose them on earth); God in heaven will honor their promise and grant to the believer freedom from sin and the judgment to come (loose them in heaven).

*and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

This is the great level of authority that is possessed by a local church of the Lord that is built upon Christ and the truths of His Word.

## **THE SUMMARY:**

As we studied the local churches foundation, we saw that

1. The church's foundation is made up of the Truths of God's Word.
2. The Word which is made up of both Old and New Testaments exclusively reveals the Lord Jesus Christ, the "cornerstone" of that foundation.
3. Anyone who teaches these truths of Christ in the midst of His assembly will be adding to the foundation of that assembly.
4. The church, when it proclaims the truths of God possesses a tremendous amount of authority knowing that the Lord is support their teachings of sin, salvation and the eternity to come.

Why should we should attend, join and support the ministries of a local church? It is founded upon the truths of Christ that are presented in His Word. Because its foundation and message is based upon Christ, the church carries a tremendous amount of authority that is supported by God Himself.

**May the Lord bless us as we seek His truth.**

# **The Mission Of The Local Assembly**

## The Importance Of The Local Church -5

### ***"The Mission Of The Church: The Great Commission"***

**"...The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)**

In this fifth lesson of our study on the Lord's church, we will be looking at the church's mission. The mission the Lord has given to His churches is commonly described as "The Great Commission. Let's take the next few studies to come to a better understanding of the mission of the Lord's churches...

#### **THE STUDY:**

#### **The Responsibilities and Recipients of The Great Commission Are Described...**

##### 1. The complete texts of the Great Commission:

*Matthew 28:18-20*

*"Then the **eleven disciples** went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. **Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen.**" (Matthew 28:16-20)*

*Mark 16:14-18*

*"Afterward he appeared unto **the eleven** as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, **Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.** And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."*

*Luke 24:33-50*

*"And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found **the eleven** gathered together, and them that were with them, Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things [were done] in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread. And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace [be] unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them [his] hands and [his] feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said*

unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took [it], and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These [are] the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and [in] the prophets, and [in] the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved 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 among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.** And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them."

John 20:19-25

"Then the same day at evening, being the first [day] of the week, when the doors were shut where **the disciples were assembled** for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace [be] unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them [his] hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, **Peace [be] unto you: as [my] Father hath sent me, even so send I you.** And when he had said this, he breathed on [them], and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; [and] whose soever [sins] ye retain, they are retained. **But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.**"

Acts 1:2-9

"Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto **the apostles whom he had chosen:** To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with [them], commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, [saith he], ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. **But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.** And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight."

## 2. The Responsibilities of the Great Commission:

A. To Take The Gospel To The Lost, Locally and World-Wide:

Matthew: **Go ye therefore, and teach all nations**

Mark: **Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.**

Luke: **And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.**

John: **as [my] Father hath sent me, even so send I you.**

Acts: ***ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.***

*B. To Baptize Into The Assembly Those Who Have Made Professions Of Faith:*

Matthew: ***baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:***

Mark: ***He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.***

(Here Christ confirms that baptism is one PROOF of a genuine salvation experience. If someone claims belief in Christ, but is not willing to publically confess Christ is their Savior, the authenticity of their experience must be questioned.)

Luke: Not mentioned

John: Not mentioned

Acts: Not mentioned

*C. To Teach God's Word To The Assembly Members To Equip Them For Service:*

Matthew: ***Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:***

Mark: Not mentioned

Luke: Not mentioned

John: Not mentioned

Acts: Not mentioned

### 3. The Recipients of the Great Commission:

The assembled Apostles (ie the local church at Jerusalem) with, in some cases, other disciples who were assembled with them, when He delivered the Great Commission.

Matthew: ***eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.***

Mark: ***the eleven as they sat at meat,***

Luke: ***the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them,*** (We have the eleven Apostles assembled with other disciples. Probably by this point in time, other saved individuals had joined the Lord's assembly.)

John: ***the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews,... But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him,*** (This is a gathering of the "disciples" which obviously included 10 of the eleven Apostles. Note later in the account we are told that Thomas was not there but the other 10 Apostles confirmed they were present at the meeting and told Thomas what had taken place.)

Acts: ***the apostles whom he had chosen;... being assembled together with [them],***

### **THE SUMMARY:**

As we studied the local churches commission we have seen:



1. That great commission was always given to the assembled Apostles that made up the first local church (church at Jerusalem). (Please note the exception: In John, we saw that Thomas was missing but the rest of the eleven were present.)
2. There are three basic responsibilities involved with the Great Commission:  
To evangelize the lost; to baptize into the assembly those who profess faith in Christ; to indoctrinate church members to equip them for the service of Christ.

In the next few parts to this series we will look at the responsibilities of the Great Commission in greater detail.

Why should we should attend, join and support the ministries of a local church? It is the ONLY organization that has been given the responsibilities of the Great Commission. Should we not all be supportive of the organization God has ordained to send His truth into the world for His honor and glory?

*"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what [is] the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him [be] glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." (Ephesians 3:14-21)*

**May the Lord bless us as we seek His truth.**

## The Importance Of The Local Church -6

### ***"The Mission Of The Church: Evangelize The Lost"***

**"...The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)**

In this sixth lesson of our study on the Lord's church, we will be looking at the first responsibility given to the church in the Great Commission. This is the responsibility to take the gospel message to a lost and dying world....

#### **THE STUDY:**

#### **The First Responsibility Found In The Great Commission: Evangelize The Lost.**

##### 1. What Is The Gospel Message:

The clearest definition of the four parts of the gospel message is found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8:

***"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain...."***

Part #1 Christ's Death

***"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;"***

Part #2 Christ's Burial

***"And that he was buried,"***

Part #3 Christ's Resurrection

***"and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:"***

Part #4 The Witnesses To The Resurrection

***"And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."***

##### 2. The Responsibility to take the gospel to the lost is given to the Lord's local assemblies in:

Matthew 28:18-20: To Make Disciples, or Students, Of Christ

***"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,..."***

Taking the gospel to the lost is described as "teaching" in the above text. The Greek word that is translated "teach" means to "to make a disciple, follower or student". In other words, the local church is to take the gospel message that is able to transform the lost into a disciple, or follower, of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is responsible to take the gospel message into all areas of the globe. This is done through the support of missionaries and other ministries (print, radio, tv, internet ministries) that take the gospel worldwide.

Mark 16:14-18: To Declare The Good News Of Christ

***"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."***

The command to take the gospel to the lost is "preach the gospel" in the gospel of Mark. The Greek meaning of this phrase is "to declare publically the good news". The local assembly is to take the good news of Christ, His coming and His work and declare it to the public.

The gospel is not a message to be kept within the walls of the church but is to be taken out into the public arena sharing Christ with those who do not know Him. In both Matthew and Mark, the church is told to "GO", again teaching us to take the gospel into the world, not wait for the world to enter into the church.

The church services are meant to instruct and strengthen the members of the church so they can then declare the gospel to the world when they leave the assembly and live their lives among their lost family, friends, acquaintances and anyone they may come in contact with.

(Please note: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"... this phrase is teaching us that, although belief in Christ is the only prerequisite to salvation, a willingness to be baptized is a strong indication that genuine belief has taken place in the heart of man. If a person claims to believe in Christ, but is not willing to publically declare that faith by baptism, the authenticity of his faith must be questioned. That's why Christ is saying that the local church can give assurance of salvation to those "that believeth and is baptized". For those who lack a willingness to be baptized, great care must be exercised in giving them confidence in their salvation experience.)

Luke 24:33-50: To reveal man's responsibility to receive the gospel message

***"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things."***

Along with proclaiming the gospel message, the church is to proclaim man's responsibility to receive the message by faith. This is described by the phrase "repentance and remission of sins". As members of the local assembly were to tell others about Christ and His work, they are to also teach them their need of "repentance".

The Greek word translated "repentance" means "to change the mind or attitude". The lost individual, as they hear the gospel, must change their attitude about Christ and His Work... instead of ignoring it, they must take it seriously; instead of rejecting it, they must accept it as truth; instead of laying it aside, they must apply it to their lives. This change in attitude about Christ and His work will result in them turning from their sin to Christ, believing on Him as their Lord and Savior. As this genuine repentance leads to belief in Him.... this then leads to the pardoning and freedom from the bondage of sin and its punishment.

Also, please note the local assembly is to begin by giving out the gospel to the area where it is located. In this case, Jerusalem and work outward taking the gospel worldwide. The first priority of a local assembly should

be its home area. As the church grows in membership and financial ability it should then gradually increase its missionary outreach to all areas of the globe.

John 20:19-25: To be sent as Jesus was sent

***"as [my] Father hath sent me, even so send I you."***

The church being sent in to the world is now favorably compared to Christ being sent into the world. In many ways the two sending are similar. Some of these similarities are:

1. Being sent under Divine authority as ambassadors of a life giving message (John 3:17)
2. Being sent to reveal God's Word to a lost and dying world (Hebs 1:1-2)
3. Seeking to do only those things that please our Lord (John 8:29)

The list is endless...

Acts 1:2-9: To Share our experience of Christ with others

***"ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."***

Declaring the gospel is described here as being "witnesses". The idea of a witness is "one that declares that which he has experienced". Especially this word is describing a "martyr" or one that is willing to give his all for the sake of proclaiming his message. This helps the local church to understand both the content and importance of taking the gospel to the lost.

The content...The members of the church are to declare to others what they have seen and experienced in their relationship to Christ. Many times people are timid to share Christ with others out of fear they do not have the right words to say. When really all the Lord asks of us is to tell others about our experience with Christ. Just tell others what He has done for us. It is truly as simple as that.

The importance... as members of His local church, we are to be willing to give our all for the sake of the declaration of our wonderful experience with Christ. As He has given His life for His church, so too it's members are to give their lives for Him. (Eph 5:25)

Here in Acts, once again, we find the prioritization of the delivery of the gospel message in detail. The church is to begin in their local area and gradually move farther out as God supplies the ability. Note the listing given with an example to be applied in our day and age... Jerusalem, the CITY where the church is located; Judaea, equivalent to the state in which the church is located; Samaria, the other states that make up the nation where the church is located; uttermost parts of the world, the other nations of the world.

## **THE SUMMARY:**

As we studied the local churches commission we have seen:

1. That great commission was always given to the assembled Apostles that made up the first local church (church at Jerusalem). (Please note the exception: In John, we saw that Thomas was missing but the rest of the eleven were present.)
2. There are three basic responsibilities involved with the Great Commission:  
To evangelize the lost; to baptize into the assembly those who profess faith in Christ; to indoctrinate church members to equip them for the service of Christ.

As we studied the first part of the Great Commission that is given to His assemblies we have seen:

1. The content of the gospel message:

Christ's Death; Christ's Burial; Christ's Resurrection; The Witnesses To The Resurrection

2. The Responsibility to take the gospel to the lost is given to the Lord's local assemblies is described as:  
To make students Of Christ; To declare the good news of Christ; To reveal man's responsibility to receive the gospel message; To be sent as Jesus was sent; To share our experience of Christ with others

3. The priority of taking the Gospel into the world

Jerusalem, the CITY where the church is located; Judaea, equivalent to the state in which the church is located; Samaria, the other states that make up the nation where the church is located; uttermost parts of the world, the other nations of the world.

Why should we should attend, join and support the ministries of a local church? It is the ONLY organization that has been given the responsibility to take the gospel into a lost and dying world. It is through the local church that we are prepared to go, given the authority to go, and given ongoing support to go.

**May the Lord bless us as we seek His truth.**

## The Importance Of The Local Church -7

# ***"The Mission Of The Church: The Ordinances of Baptism and Lord's Supper***

**"...The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)**

In this seventh lesson of our study on the Lord's church, we will be looking at the second responsibility given to the church in the Great Commission. This is the responsibility to baptize those who profess faith in Christ into the membership of the assembly....

### **THE STUDY:**

#### **The Second Responsibility Found In The Great Commission: Baptize Into the Assembly.**

##### 1. What Is Baptism?: A public profession of faith in Christ and His Work

*"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. **The like figure whereunto [even] baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.**" (1 Peter 3:18-22)*

Peter now speaks of an OT event which is a picture of the ordinance of baptism. Christ spoke to the wicked men of Noah's day through the ministry of Noah as he built the ark. It was a public testimony of Noah's faith in Christ and his belief in the message that his Lord had given to him through the inspiration and illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Just as the salvation of the individuals in the ark during the flood was a living symbolic picture of salvation found in Christ. The ark pictured Christ, those in the ark pictures the believers and the judgment of sin pictured by the flood. Baptism symbolically pictures the same truth... salvation through the work of Christ from sin and its results.

Baptism as a picture of salvation from sins:

Baptism is immersion in water...

The word "baptize" is used several times in the New Testament and is translated from a Greek word that means "to be immersed, submerged, or soaked". Biblical baptism is when an individual is actually immersed (picturing a burial) in water.

The steps of an individuals baptism are as follows...

1. The individual stands in the body of water.
2. The individual is lowered (until totally covered) into the water
3. The individual is raised from the water into a standing position.

These steps proclaim what Christ has done on his behalf:

1. When, first standing in the water, it is a picture of Christ standing on the earth working on behalf of his people. His teaching, His healing, and most importantly, his arrest, abuse and crucifixion are all symbolized by this standing.
2. When lowered under the water, it is a picture of the death and burial of Christ, done on behalf of those who are saved.
3. When brought up out of the water, it is a picture of the resurrection of Christ, the proof that He paid the price necessary to secure salvation for His people and He is now victorious over death.

These steps of baptism also proclaim what God has done in the life of the new believer:

1. When, first standing in the water, it is a picture of the believer's walk on earth prior to his salvation experience. It is a sinful walk based upon selfish desires and the lusts of his flesh.
2. When lowered under the water, it is a picture of the believer who is spiritually dead and under the bondage of sin.
3. When brought up out of the water, it is a picture of the believers release from sins bondage, spiritual life being given to him and a new life of service to Christ beginning.

Baptism is to proclaim to all that an individual, through salvation, has a good conscience towards God:

***"baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,)"***

Peter makes it plain that baptism is not observed to gain salvation for an individual.. "not putting away the filth of the flesh". On the contrary, Peter tells us that it is "the answer of a good conscience towards God", it is observed once the recipient recognizes his sins have been forgiven and he is now right with God. This is why he no longer has a guilty conscience before God and makes him the ideal candidate for baptism.

## 2. Baptism Is A Part Of The Great Commission Given To The Lord's Churches:

To Baptize Into The Assembly Those Who Have Made Professions Of Faith:

Matthew: ***baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:***

The "them" referred to are those who have been made followers of Christ through receipt of the gospel message.

Mark: ***He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.***

Here Christ confirms that baptism is one PROOF of a genuine salvation experience. If someone claims belief in Christ, but is not willing to publically confess Christ is their Savior, the authenticity of their experience must be questioned.

Not only is baptism a public declaration of our faith in Christ, but it is also the prerequisite to church membership...

**"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also [is] Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether [we be] Jews or Gentiles, whether [we be] bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)**

Although a local church is made up of many members, the local church is still one, unified body. Under the leadership of the indwelling Spirit, the new believer is led of God to partake of water baptism and join into the membership of the local assembly.

The only prerequisite of water baptism is faith in Christ. Jew or Gentile, slave or free may receive this ordinance and become members of His local assembly, as long as they have trusted in Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Along with Baptism, although not a part of the great commission, the local assembly is given the responsibility to observe the Lord's Supper.

1. What Is The Lord's Supper?: It is a public profession and remembrance of Christ, His work and His second coming.

**"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the [same] night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake [it], and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also [he took] the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink [it], in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)**

The Apostle Paul, as he instructs the local church at Corinth, explains to them the purpose of the Lord's Supper observance, as taught by Christ Himself. It is to commemorate the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Eating the bread reminds us of Christ's body that was bruised and abused on our behalf. Drinking the fruit of the vine reminds us of His shed blood on our behalf. The Lord also commanded the church to observe this ordinance until He comes again.

2. How do we know that the responsibilities for the Lord's Supper observance was given to the local church?

Paul, as he writes to the Corinth church says that **For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you.** Paul clearly said that he was delivering the instructions for this ordinance to the local assembly, the addressee of his letter.

Also, when Christ observed the supper it was with the local church at Jerusalem made up of His Apostles. There were eleven of His Apostles present for the observance of the supper (Judas left prior to the observance following his accusation) ...



***"Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve... And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed [it], and brake [it], and gave [it] to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave [it] to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:20-28)***

***"And in the evening he cometh with the twelve... And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake [it], and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave [it] to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God." (Mark 14:17-25)***

***"And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide [it] among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake [it], and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup [is] the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. (Luke 22:14-20)***

#### **THE SUMMARY:**

As we studied the local churches commission we have seen:

1. That great commission was always given to the assembled Apostles that made up the first local church (church at Jerusalem). (Please note the exception: In John, we saw that Thomas was missing but the rest of the eleven were present.)
2. There are three basic responsibilities involved with the Great Commission: To evangelize the lost; to baptize into the assembly those who profess faith in Christ; to indoctrinate church members to equip them for the service of Christ.

As we studied the first part of the Great Commission that is given to His assemblies we have seen:

1. The content of the gospel message:  
Christ's Death; Christ's Burial; Christ's Resurrection; The Witnesses To The Resurrection
2. The Responsibility to take the gospel to the lost is given to the Lord's local assemblies is described as:  
To make students Of Christ; To declare the good news of Christ; To reveal man's responsibility to receive the gospel message; To be sent as Jesus was sent; To share our experience of Christ with others
3. The priority of taking the Gospel into the world  
Jerusalem, the CITY where the church is located; Judaea, equivalent to the state in which the church is located; Samaria, the other states that make up the nation where the church is located; uttermost parts of the world, the other nations of the world.

As we studied the second part of the Great Commission we have seen that the Lord has given to His assemblies the responsibility to observe both Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

1. Baptism is a public profession of faith in Christ and His Work
2. Baptism pictures the work of Christ on our behalf
3. Baptism is a picture of our salvation from sins
4. Baptism Is A Part Of The Great Commission Given To The Lord's Churches:
5. Baptism is a prerequisite to church membership

6. The Lord's Supper observance is also the responsibility of a local assembly.
7. The Lord's Supper is to commemorate the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Why should we should attend, join and support the ministries of a local church? It is the ONLY organization that has been given the responsibility to observe the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. To properly partake of these, they must be regulated, supplied and observed by a local assembly of the Lord.

**May the Lord bless us as we seek His truth.**

## The Importance Of The Local Church -8

### ***"The Mission Of The Church: To Instruct It's Members"***

**"...The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)**

In this eighth lesson of our study on the Lord's church, we will be looking at the third responsibility given to the church in the Great Commission. This is the responsibility to teach those who profess faith in Christ into the membership of the assembly....

#### **THE STUDY:**

#### **The Third Responsibility Found In The Great Commission: Teaching It's Members The Word Of God.**

##### 1. Where is this responsibility found?:

Matthew's Account Of The Great Commission...

*"Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: **Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:** and, lo, I am with you always, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:16-20)*

The responsibility to teach the members of the assembly is found in the Matthew account of the Great Commission only. Please note several things about this responsibility...

##### 1. It involves "teaching".

The word translated "teaching" in the phrase "Teaching them to observe all things..." is a different Greek word than that which is translated "teach" in the phrase "teach all nations".

(If you recall the meaning of "TEACH all nations" was a Greek word that meant to take the gospel to all nations. In other words, it meant to share with the lost the good news of Christ and salvation.)

In our text for this study, the Greek word translated "TEACHING them to observe all things..." is a Greek word that means "to indoctrinate", "to instruct", "to share knowledge", or "to cause to learn". It is through understanding the difference between these two Greek words that we get a clear picture of what was meant in Matthew's account of the GC.

2. It involves teaching "them". Who does "them" refer to? It is those who have been given the gospel, accepting it by faith and submitting to church membership through baptism...

The local assembly is to...

1. "Teach all nations" - Take the gospel to the lost world showing them Christ and the salvation He is offering.
2. "Baptizing them in the name of ..." - When they are saved, they are to make a public profession of that faith and join the local assembly through baptism.
3. "Teaching them to observe" - Once a member of the church, they are to be instructed by the assembly.

We find the same responsibility reaffirmed by the Apostle Paul as he ministered to the local churches of the Gentile world....

*"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.... For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. **Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.** For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. (Acts 20:17-31)*

The phrase "he hath purchased with His own blood" carries with it a dual application. First of all, the local assembly is made up of those for whom Christ died. So in that sense He died for the assembly. Secondly, the local assemblies, as the body of Christ, receive the purification of the sins of the assembly through the death of Christ on the cross, just as believers receive their blessings through this same channel (Eph 5:22-29).

Paul also reaffirmed this responsibility to Timothy, who most scholars believe was the young Pastor of the church at Ephesus....

*"I charge [thee] therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; **Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.** For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away [their] ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." (2 Timothy 4:1-5)*

2. How does the assembly carry out this responsibility? Through the ministry of godly men who are to exercise of spiritual gifts they are given.

The Godly men:

*"**And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;** For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:" (Ephesians 4:11-13)*

In this text, we can see several offices being established for the instruction and strengthening of the local assembly...

1. **apostles** – their ministry was to present the inspired New Testament writings to establish assemblies and to accredit the teachings and ministry of the local assembly. Their office and ministry ended soon after the completion of God's Word in 100 AD
2. **prophets** – their ministry was to present the Old and New Testament writings to man. Their office and ministry ended soon after the completion of God's Word in 100 AD

3. **evangelists** – their ministry is to take the gospel to the lost world. In today’s time we commonly refer to these men as “missionaries”.

4. **pastors/teachers** – their ministry, as explained in 2 Timothy 4:1-5, is to teach the local assembly, to evangelize in their local area, and to take the watch care over the assembly. (see also *Titus 1:7-9*)

Notice the aim of the teaching of His Word to the membership:

1. **“For the perfecting of the saints”** – to give the saints EVERYTHING they need to live lives that honor and glorify Christ on earth. This verse clearly tells us that nothing else is needed for the saint to live a Godly life on earth apart from the instruction of God’s Word.

2. **“For the work of the ministry”** - to give saints the needed tools to minister to the physical and spiritual needs of others.

3. **“For the edifying of the body of Christ”** – to build up, strengthen, the saints spiritually.

This teaching is to continue until

1. **“We all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God,”** - All saints come into full and complete agreement on the doctrines of their faith and an understanding of the person, work and their relationship with Christ. In other words, this teaching should continue until we go to heaven. As seen, based upon past history, all Christians will never come to total, absolute agreement on doctrinal truths this side of heaven.

2. **“unto a perfect man unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”** - All saints become spiritually mature and equipped to the point that they are living lives that compare to that of Christ on the earth, with no need of improvement. Again, this will never happen this side of heaven.

It is because of the need for churches until Christ’s second coming that He promised in the Great Commission that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). In other words, it will never enter into the realm of the unseen. It will always be seen and active until Christ comes.

ALSO NOTE: The office of “deacon” was also established. Their role is to help meet the physical needs of the members and to support the Pastor/Teachers who are to care for the members spiritual needs...

*“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. **Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples [unto them], and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.** (Acts 6:1-4) (see also I Tim 3:8-15)*

The office of deacon is not included in the Ephesians 4:11-13 because their ministry does not include spiritual instruction and strengthening of the assembly. The Ephesians listing is exclusively reserved to those who are active in the spiritual oversight and ministry of the Word to the membership.

## **THE SUMMARY:**

As we studied the local churches commission we have seen:

1. That great commission was always given to the assembled Apostles that made up the first local church (church at Jerusalem). (Please note the exception: In John, we saw that Thomas was missing but the rest of the eleven were present.)

2. There are three basic responsibilities involved with the Great Commission:

To evangelize the lost; to baptize into the assembly those who profess faith in Christ; to indoctrinate church members to equip them for the service of Christ.

As we studied the first part of the Great Commission that is given to His assemblies we have seen:

1. The content of the gospel message:  
Christ's Death; Christ's Burial; Christ's Resurrection; The Witnesses To The Resurrection
2. The Responsibility to take the gospel to the lost is given to the Lord's local assemblies is described as:  
To make students Of Christ; To declare the good news of Christ; To reveal man's responsibility to receive the gospel message; To be sent as Jesus was sent; To share our experience of Christ with others
3. The priority of taking the Gospel into the world  
Jerusalem, the CITY where the church is located; Judaea, equivalent to the state in which the church is located; Samaria, the other states that make up the nation where the church is located; uttermost parts of the world, the other nations of the world.

As we studied the second part of the Great Commission, we have seen that the Lord has given to His assemblies the responsibility to observe both Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

1. Baptism is a public profession of faith in Christ and His Work
2. Baptism pictures the work of Christ on our behalf
3. Baptism is a picture of our salvation from sins
4. Baptism Is A Part Of The Great Commission Given To The Lord's Churches:
5. Baptism is a prerequisite to church membership
6. The Lord's Supper observance is also the responsibility of a local assembly.
7. The Lord's Supper is to commemorate the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

As we have studied the third, and final part, of the Great Commission, we have seen that the Lord has given to His assemblies the responsibility to teach the Word to its members through the use of Godly, gifted men in places of leadership for its edification...

1. The responsibility to teach the members of the assembly is found in the Matthew's account of the Great Commission.
2. It involves "teaching" (ie to indoctrinate, to instruct, to cause to learn).
3. It involves teaching "them". (ie baptized believers who have joined the membership of the local assembly).
4. The same church responsibility reaffirmed by the Apostle Paul.
5. Several offices were established for the instruction and strengthening of the local assembly: apostles; prophets; evangelists; pastor/teachers. The office of evangelist and pastor/teacher continue to this day....
6. This teaching is for the good of the membership by giving the saints EVERYTHING they need to live lives that honor and glorify Christ on earth; giving saints the needed tools to minister to the physical and spiritual needs of others; to build up, strengthen, the saints spiritually.
7. This teaching is to continue until Christ comes again.

Why should we should attend, join and support the ministries of a local church? It is the only organization that has been given the responsibility to teach the truths of God's Word to His disciples. It is through the ministry of the local church that the Lord equips His saints to meet all the challenges of life on a fallen earth and still live lives glorifying to Him.

**May the Lord bless us as we seek His truth.**

## **Other Truths About The Assembly**

## The Importance Of The Local Church -9

### ***"The Blessings Of Church Membership"***

**"...The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)**

In this ninth lesson of our study on the Lord's church, we will be looking at the many blessings that can be had by those who join the membership of a local assembly...

#### **THE STUDY:**

##### **Blessings Of Spiritual Growth:**

###### 1. Receive the Teachings Of God's Word

*"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we [henceforth] be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, [and] cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, [even] Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Ephesians 4:11-16)*

As the saints are instructed in the Word, they gain....

###### 2. Spiritual Maturity & Strengthening

*"For all flesh [is] as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord [is] gracious." (1 Peter 1:24-2:3)*

##### **Blessings Of Opportunities Of Ministry:**

###### 1. Build A Good Testimony

*"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you*



*some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.* (Romans 1:8-14)

The Christian is able to build up their personal testimony through faithful attendance and increased opportunities of service, but also they are able to build a better testimony being members of a faithful church that is known publically for their faith in service.

## 2. Increased Opportunities of Service

*"But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where [were] the body? But now [are they] many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those [members] of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely [parts] have more abundant comeliness."* (1 Corinthians 12:18-23)

With increased opportunities of service also comes increased rewards when the service is completed faithfully...

## 3. Rewards For Obedience

*"And whatsoever ye do, do [it] heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons."* (Colossians 3:23-25)

## Blessings Of Community:

### 1. Encouragement

*"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of [our] faith without wavering; (for he [is] faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some [is]; but exhorting [one another]: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."* (Hebrews 10:22-25)

As saints see faithfulness in the lives of other saints, it encourages them to be faithful as well.

### 2. Fellowship

*"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added [unto them] about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."* (Acts 2:41-42)

### 3. Separation from Sinful World To Worship

*"And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately."* (Mark 6:30-32)

Just as Christ called the first church to separation from the world for a period of rest and refreshment, so too, every time the saint attends the meeting of the church, they can get their minds off of the sinful world in which they live. They can do this by concentrating more fully on the Lord through communal worship.

#### 4. Care From Others

*"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all [men], as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."* (Acts 2:44-47)

#### 5. Lord's Presence and the Joy That Follows

*"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* (Matthew 18:20)

The Lord promises showing a special presence to those who join together with others to worship Him. A result of His enhanced presence the saint also experiences increased joy....

*"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence [is] fulness of joy; at thy right hand [there are] pleasures for evermore."* (Psalms 16:11)

#### 6. Spiritual Protection

*"It is reported commonly [that there is] fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, [concerning] him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."* (1 Corinthians 5:1-5)

Here, we can see that church membership affords added protection from the powerful intervention of Satan in our lives. In this text we can see that when an individuals are removed from church membership due to unrepentant sin, they are left exposed to greater Satanic influence in their lives. This was done to show them their sinful condition and bring them back to repentance once their sinful stubborn flesh was overcome through the affliction of Satan.

#### **THE SUMMARY:**

What are the blessings of church membership that are available to all of her members?

1. Blessings Of Spiritual Growth
2. Blessings Of Opportunities Of Ministry
3. Blessings Of Community:

Why should we should attend, join and support the ministries of a local church? There are many varied blessings that will be received as faithful members of His churches.

**May the Lord bless us as we seek His truth.**

## The Importance Of The Local Church -10

### ***"The Accrediting Of The Assembly"***

**"...The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)**

In this tenth lesson of our study on the Lord's church, we will be looking at the accrediting of the assembly.

What do we mean by the term "accrediting of the assembly"? This phrase is describing the way that the Lord proved to all men that the local churches on earth are genuinely His assemblies. Although there are many religions and cults that claim to be His assembly, He has given us indisputable proof that only His local assemblies on earth were established and authorized by Him.

#### **THE STUDY:**

The Lord Accredited His Assemblies Through The Use Of Miraculous Gifts Exercised By Those Who Were Members Of His Assemblies...

#### **The Exercise Of The Gifts:**

- 1) *Now concerning spiritual [gifts], brethren, I would not have you ignorant.*
  - 2) *Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.*
  - 3) *Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and [that] no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.*
  - 4) *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*
  - 5) *And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.*
  - 6) *And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.*
  - 7) *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*
- (1 Corinthians 12:1-7)*

Because there were many who did not recognize the authenticity of God's Word nor His place of worship, the Lord graciously gave miraculous gifts to his local assemblies to endorse their message and their claims of authority. Through the workings of these miracles, the Lord clearly differentiated between His message and house of worship from all of the counterfeits that this fallen world has to offer. Although these gifts are many and diverse, they were all given by the same God for the singular purpose of accreditation and edification of His fledgling assemblies.

- 11) *I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.*
  - 12) *Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.*
  - 13) *For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except [it be] that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong.*
- (2 Corinthians 12:11-13)*

Here, Paul helps us to understand that these gifts were given to accredit (give irrefutable proof) the God-given authority of the apostolic office (an office created to expedite the founding of His local assemblies).

*27) Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.*

*28) And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.*

*29) [Are] all apostles? [are] all prophets? [are] all teachers? [are] all workers of miracles?*

*30) Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?*

*31) But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.*

*(1 Corinthians 12:27-31)*

In this text, we see that the Lord not only varied the gifts that were given, but also He varied the individual recipient of the gift. Not all men received the same gift(s), but God distributed His gifts based upon the needs of the local assembly and their community. The recipient's only responsibility was to exercise the best gift(s) that he was given in accord with the will of God for his individual ministry. What are the "best gifts"? The gifts most needed by the assembly. This phrase is basically teaching that each member should have desired to exercise whatever gift they possessed that would be of greatest benefit to the assembly for the current situation.

### The Identity and Role Of The Gifts:

*8) For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;*

*9) To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;*

*10) To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another [divers] kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:*

*11) But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.*

*(1 Corinthians 12:8-11)*

Here we find a specific list of the accrediting gifts given by God. They are divided into three basic types:

1. **The Revelation Of The Truth** - The supernatural handing down of God's Word to man: "word of wisdom" (utterance of wisdom), "word of knowledge" (utterance of knowledge).

2. **The Signs Of The Truth** – The supernatural marks that indicate the presence of the divinely authorized Truth: "faith" (not the fruit of saving faith, this is extraordinary faith that resulted in the performance of miracles), "gifts of healing" (using an individual as the instrument of a physical healing), "working of miracles" (ability to exercise of power to accomplish what is naturally impossible), "prophecy" (to perfectly foretell a future event), "discerning of spirits" (perfect judgment of the aim and content of a message)

3. **The Proclamation Of The Truth** – The supernatural ability to proclaim truth in an unknown tongue: "diverse kinds of tongues" (the ability to speak God's Word in a human language that is known by the hearer but unknown by the speaker), "the interpretation of tongues" (the ability to interpret God's Word into a language known by the hearers. This is a miracle sign gift because the language of the original message, or the language of the hearers is unknown to the interpreter).

### The Ceasing Of The Gifts – The Word's effect on them:

*"Charity never faileth: but whether [there be] prophecies, they shall fail; whether [there be] tongues, they shall cease; whether [there be] knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." (1 Corinthians 13:8-10)*

The gifts involving "the revelation of the truth" ended immediately with the completion of God's Word being given to man in approx. 100 AD. This can be seen in the phrases "they shall fail" and "it shall vanish away". In the original language of Greek, these phrases reveal that the failing and the vanishing away would take place with something directly acting upon them. What was that "something" that acted upon them bringing them to an end? The completion of God's Word.... "that which is perfect".

The gifts involving "the signs of the truth" and "the proclamation of the truth" went out of existence gradually following the completion of God's Word. Once the Word was completed, the Lord ceased from granting these gifts to His assembly. Those who possessed these gifts continued to exercise them until their physical death. These gifts gradually "died off" as the miracle workers died off. This can be seen in the phrase "they shall cease". This phrase in the original language teaches us that these gifts will cease "in and of themselves". Nothing would act upon them bringing them to an abrupt end, but they would cease of their own deficiency. Since the gifts were no longer granted, as the miracle workers died, these gifts went out of existence because they lacked an ongoing renewal.

There is no longer a need for these visible proofs of the authenticity of the Lord's assembly. Now that we have the completed Word of God, we have a written record of this accreditation. It now becomes an issue of faith in the record of Word of God for proof of the accreditation of His assembly.

### The Ceasing Of The Gifts – Their length of existence:

Over the years, studying the sign gifts of the Bible, I have learned something very interesting. It seems as if these sign miracles of God were basically performed in three "groups" throughout Biblical history. Please notice the following basic, generalized table to help explain my point:

<b>Description</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Group 3</b>
Miracle Workers	Moses, Joshua	Elijah, Elisha	Christ, Apostles
Message Accredited	Law	Prophets	New Testament
Place Of Worship Accredited	Tabernacle	Temple	Church
Dates of Accreditation (Approximate) <small>Based upon Philip Mauro's Chronology</small>	1530 BC-1460 BC	835 BC-765 BC	30 AD-100 AD

It has been so interesting for me to come to an understanding of the Lord's motives in these sign miracles that were performed. Note that the Lord, through divine miracles, accredited the messenger, as well as the section of Scripture written, and the worship place used at that time. In each case, the "sign miracles" were in existence for approximately 70 years. In each case, a "silent time" existed after each group of miracles, where no sign miracles and few, if any, other miracles were performed. Why? Once God established the validity of each of the above segments, there was no need for miracles until another segment was about to take place.

For example, following the accreditation of the tabernacle and the message of the law, there was no reason to accredit anything, or anyone, until the temple and the prophets came on the scene. Likewise, there was an extended period of "miracle silence" after the completion of the Old Testament. It was only when Christ came on the scene that we have a period of sign miracles taking place to validate the message of the New Testament and the church as the new place of worship for God's people.

So therefore, tongues, being one of several sign gifts came to an end approximately 70 years after they had come into existence (29 or 30 AD), probably about 90-100 AD. They would have gone out of existence in and of themselves, nothing had to act on them. This is unlike the gift of prophecy and knowledge which ceased at the completion of God's Word.

**THE SUMMARY:**

The Lord has clearly displayed that the local assemblies on earth are the genuine, authorized places of worship for Jehovah God. As such, they are the assemblies that are to proclaim the true message given from God to man contained in the Bible.

Why should we should attend, join and support the ministries of a local church? God, Himself as proven beyond doubt that He has sanctioned the local assembly as His place of worship and His minister of God's completed Word to mankind.

**May the Lord bless us as we seek His truth.**

## The Importance Of The Local Church -11

### ***"The Membership and Attendance Of The Assembly"***

**"...The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)**

In this eleventh lesson of our study on the Lord's church, we will be looking at the teachings of the Bible concerning the importance of church attendance.

We will be looking at this subject from three different standpoints:

1. The command to attend the assembly
2. The examples to attend the assembly
3. Our responsibility to others to attend the assembly

### **THE STUDY:**

#### ***The command to attend the assembly***

Perhaps Hebrews 10:25 is a command for every believer to join, and faithfully attend the Lord's local assembly... ***"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."***

Here, the Christian is exhorted to not "abandon" or "permanently walk away" from the assembly of believers. This can hold one of three meanings:

1. This is speaking of the assembly of believers in the Lord's church.

In this case, this text explains the need for Christians to not abandon the attendance of a local assembly where God's people meet. It seems to go further and explain that as the second coming of Christ draws nearer, the need for faithful attendance to the assembly will increase.

This interpretation is the historical interpretation that is held by most Godly men of the past. Also, it seems to apply in today's time that we see more and more Christians forsaking the assembly. This could be why we are told to attend ***"so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."*** Could this be said because, in the latter days, there would be a forsaking of His assembly?

If someone does walk away with no intention of every returning to the place of worship, prayer, praise and fellowship there is a real question as to whether his faith is a persevering, genuine faith. This is the point John made in 1 John 2:19 – ***"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."***

However, there is another possible interpretation of this text as well...

2. This could be telling the followers of Christ to not forsake belief, nor concentration, on His second coming when He will "assemble" His people to Himself.

A true genuine faith will not lose hope in the second coming of Christ and the entrance of His saints to glory. Col 1:27-29 makes it plain that the indwelling Spirit and His second coming are inseparably linked and a source of great encouragement for the people of God... *"To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily."*

Why do many believe this is the interpretation of this text?

The phrase "assembling together" comes from one Greek word "episunagoge" it carries with it the idea of "a gathering from all areas" or "a complete gathering". This same word is only used one other time in the Scriptures in 2 Thess 2:1 where it is speaking of the assembling of God's people at the second coming of Christ. This word for assembly NEVER spoke of God's people assembling in a church meeting. There is another Greek word "ecclesia" that is normally used to describe that type of assembly.

Lastly, Peter related a denial of His second coming to lost mankind in the days before His coming in 2 Pet 3:3-4.... *"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, **Where is the promise of his coming?** for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."*

This can explain the phrase **"so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."**

These are the basic reasons why some believe this text is speaking of not forsaking a belief in His second coming and the deliverance of His people from a sinful world. But to further explain the confusion on this text...

3. Could this text be referring to the assembling of believers in BOTH ways we have previously described?

We need to study the root word from which we get "episunagoge" which comes from the Greek word "Episunago" this root word is used as follows:

1. Christ gathering Jerusalem like a mother hen to protect them – Matt 23:37, Luke 13:34
2. Christ gathering His people at His second coming – Matt 24:31, Mark 13:27
3. Citizens of a city gathered to see miracles of Christ – Mark 1:33
4. Multitudes following Christ to hear His teachings – Luke 12:1

In EVERY case the Greek word "episunago" and it's derivative "episunagoge" is used to described people gathered TO CHRIST. There is no exception to this. This is a very important point.

In Hebrews 10:25, a way to transliterate this verse would be "Not abandoning the assembling ourselves to Christ, as the manner of some is..."

If this is the case, then either event could apply to this text...

1. You see, when God's people meet to worship Him, He promises to be in their "midst" in the person of the Holy Spirit. (Matt 18:18-20, 1 Cor 5:4).



2. And as we have seen previously, we will all be gathered together to be with Him at His second coming. (1 Thess 4:13-18).

Could it be, that this verse is written on purpose to be vague, and both ways of understanding it are in alignment with God's Word? We have seen in this short section, Scriptural foundation laid that support both views. In my own personal studies, I believe this dual-view of the text is the closest interpretation to its intended meaning.

#### 4. Basic Principle Summarized...

To summarize this verse... Whatever was meant by the phrase "assembly" the principle is basically the same. To encourage (exhort) other believers, and ourselves, we need to be sure we are living out our beliefs. This can be done by not forsaking church membership and by not forsaking our hope in the second coming of Christ. This is the last great sign of a living faith that will affect the lives of others.

#### **The examples of attendance of the assembly**

Here are a few, of many texts, that set a clear example for believers to join and attend the local assembly...

1. *"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, **as his custom was**, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read."* (Luke 4:16)

Jesus set the example for us by consistently ("**as his custom was**") attending the place of worship chosen by God. (Which was during the first stages of His ministry, the synagogue).

2. *"Now the first [day] of the [feast of] unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover. **Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.** And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I? And he answered and said, He that dippeth [his] hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said. **And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed [it], and brake [it], and gave [it] to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave [it] to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.** And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives."* (Matthew 26:17-30)

Here Jesus met with the first church members (His apostles) as they met to observe the Lord's Supper PRIOR TO His death. This is one of many examples showing us that Jesus continued to set the example for us of attendance to the new place of worship, the local assembly.

**3. "Then the same day at evening, being the first [day] of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace [be] unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them [his] hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace [be] unto you: as [my] Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on [them], and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; [and] whose soever [sins] ye retain, they are retained." (John 20:19-23)**

Following Christ's death we find the church continues to meet on the first day of the week. Again, this is setting the example for us.

**4. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added [unto them] about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles." (Acts 2:41-43)**

Following Christ's ascension, the Lord's church continued to meet on a regular basis. This can be seen throughout the book of Acts and the Pauline epistles.

These verses, and others, clearly establish that the followers of Christ joined together forming an assembly and then continued to meet together for instruction, encouragement, and fellowship.

### **Our responsibility to others to attend the assembly**

There are many texts that help us to understand that all of us have a responsibility to join a local assembly, and by doing so, show our love to our brethren (John 13:34-35). This is done by giving them support, encouragement and strength.

**"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think [of himself] more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: **So we, [being] many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.**" (Romans 12:3-5)**

**"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also [is] Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether [we be] Jews or Gentiles, whether [we be] bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body [were] an eye, where [were] the hearing? If the whole [were] hearing, where [were] the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where [were] the body? But now [are they] many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those [members] of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely [parts] have more abundant comeliness. For our comely [parts]**

*have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that [part] which lacked: **That there should be no schism in the body; but [that] the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.***" (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

*"As every man hath received the gift, **[even so] minister the same one to another**, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."* (1 Peter 4:10)

*"Wherefore **comfort yourselves together, and edify one another**, even as also ye do."* (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

***"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess [your] faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*** Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." (James 5:14-18)

When we come to understand the role that we can play in the lives of our brethren within the context of local assembly, we can see it is our duty to join the assembly for the sake of our love to them.

## **THE SUMMARY:**

Through these verses we are given an understanding of the importance of membership and attendance in the Lord's local assembly. May we all remember the Lord's command, His example, the example of other New Testament believers, and the great opportunities that await us to show our love for others, to motivate us to find a local assembly of the Lord, enter into its membership, and serve Him among our brethren.

Why should we should attend, join and support the ministries of a local church? It is an act of obedience to the Lord, and it is an act of love towards the other spiritual brethren in your area.

*Just a quick note... Please keep in mind, this study as all the rest of the studies, is only speaking about our responsibility to the Lord's local churches that exist throughout the earth. These principles do not apply to other houses of worship that hold to false doctrine and are not sanctioned by Christ. The idea that "it is better to attend a false church than no church at all" is unscriptural and can actually harm a child of God's testimony, growth and communion with the Lord.*

*What happens if there is no church of the Lord in my area? The best way to handle this situation is to find the closest church of the Lord and explain your situation and your desire for an assembly in your area. They will then examine your particular situation and find the best remedy for you. Normally, most church will accept your membership under these conditions, minister to you through the mail or internet and also seek to establish a sound body that you are able to attend.*

**May the Lord bless us as we seek His truth.**

## The Importance Of The Local Church -12

### ***"The Metaphors Describing The Assembly"***

**"...The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)**

In this twelfth lesson of our study on the Lord's church, we will be looking at the metaphors used in the Bible to describe the Lord's assembly. By studying these metaphors we will be seeing another aspect of the importance of the Lord's assembly for every Christian.

Basically, a metaphor is used to describe a likeness that exists between two unrelated things.

An example of this is when Christ said "I am the door" in John 10:9. Although Christ is totally unrelated to a literal door, He uses this metaphor to describe the idea that it is through Him that we can receive access to eternal life (just like a door gives access to a room).

### **THE STUDY:**

Here is a listing and short descriptions of the main metaphors used in God's Word to reveal truths about His local assembly.

#### **1. "The Pillar and Ground Of The Truth"**

*"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, **the pillar and ground of the truth.**" (1 Timothy 3:15)*

The local assembly holds up (pillar) and supports (foundation) the truths of God's Word. It is through the ministry of the local assembly that the truths of God are published and defended.

#### **2. "The House Of God"**

*"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in **the house of God,** which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)*

The church is a meeting place for the Lord and His family. It is within the confines of the assembly of God that the Lord meets with His people in a very special way. As they worship, seek His face, and desire to serve Him; He, in turn, speaks to them through His Word.

#### **3. "The Flock Of God"**

*"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all **the flock**, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28)*

*"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed **the flock of God** which is among you, taking the oversight [thereof], not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over [God's] heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." (1 Peter 5:1-4)*

The metaphor of the flock teaches us many truths about the Lord's relation to His local assembly. Here, the Lord is pictured as the "chief Shepherd" while His assembly is pictured as a flock of sheep:

1. The Lord feeds His assembly, as a shepherd feeds his sheep. – The church is to look to Him for their spiritual strength and nourishment.
2. The Lord leads His assembly, as a shepherd leads his sheep – The church is to follow the Lord and His will for their lives
3. The Lord protects His assembly, as a shepherd protects his sheep – The church is to rely upon Him for their spiritual warfare, realizing they are defenseless without Him.
4. The Lord died for His assembly, as a shepherd gives his life to protect his sheep. This allows the forgiveness of sins of the individuals within the assembly, as well as, the sins committed by the church as a local assembly. – Now we, as individual members and an assembly, should be committed to serve Him with all our beings, as living sacrifices for Him.
5. Human pastors are given the responsibility to watch over the Lord's assemblies in His absence, and empowered and led by the Spirit are to feed, lead and protect the assembly.

Not only did Christ die for the individual members of a local church, but also He died for the church as an assembly. (see more about this under metaphor #6, Eph 5:22-31)

#### 4. "The Body Of Christ"

*"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think [of himself] more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as **we have many members in one body**, and all members have not the same office: So **we, [being] many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.**" (Romans 12:3-5)*

*"For as **the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also [is] Christ.** For by one Spirit are **we all baptized into one body**, whether [we be] Jews or Gentiles, whether [we be] bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For **the body is not one member, but many.** If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the **body; is it therefore not of the body?** And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the **body; is it therefore not of the body?** If the whole **body [were] an eye, where [were] the hearing?** If the whole [were] hearing, where [were] the smelling? But now hath **God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.** And if they were all one member, where [were] the **body?** But now **[are they] many members, yet but one body.** And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more **those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:** And **those [members] of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely [parts] have more abundant comeliness.** For our comely [parts] have no need: but **God hath tempered the body***

**together**, having given more abundant honour to that [part] which lacked: That **there should be no schism in the body; but [that] the members should have the same care one for another.** And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. **Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.**" (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

Although the church membership is made up of individual members, we are to remember there is a unity that exists between those members, therefore we are to treat each other with respect and a willingness to minister to each other.

The individual members of the local assembly have specific tasks to fulfill within that assembly. When each of the members is submitted to fulfill the specific role each has been given, the church is a healthy church which will work together in unity for the cause of Christ. Every member is brought into the local body to contribute to the functioning of that body with the specific gifts and ministries that they have been given.

**"And hath put all [things] under his feet, and gave him [to be] the head over all [things] to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."** (Ephesians 1:22-23)

Christ possesses the authority to rule over all, including His local assembly on earth. The church is to be in submission to Him. Christ, fills the assembly revealing Himself to the local church as they worship Him in spirit and in truth.

**"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we [henceforth] be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, [and] cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, [even] Christ:"** (Ephesians 4:11-15)

The offices of the local church were established for the strengthening, maturing and enabling of the members of the assembly. This spiritual growth of the assembly allows them to recognize and refute false teaching as well as become more holy as an assembly and individual Christians in that assembly.

**"If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and [be] not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, [and] which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; [Even] the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:"** (Colossians 1:23-26)

The church's role is to proclaim the truths of the gospel message which will result in affliction and persecution of the assembly. This persecution should be accepted with joy realizing that Christ suffered for us as individuals and the assembly as a whole.

## 5. "A Candlestick"

**"And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; And in the midst of the seven candlesticks [one] like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment**

*down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and [his] hairs [were] white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes [were] as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance [was] as the sun shineth in his strength.” (Revelation 1:12-16)*

*“Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and **the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.**” (Revelation 1:19-20)*

Here we see a vision John received in vs 12-16 and the interpretation of that vision in vs 19-20. In the interpretation, we find that the candlesticks in his vision represent the local assemblies of the Lord. Why is the assembly pictured as a candlestick? Because it holds forth the light of God’s Word in the midst of a sin darkened world around us. Also note the close relationship that Christ shares with His assemblies. They all surround Him picturing subjects who have entered the presence of a king awaiting His commands.

## 6. Every Local Assembly Will Someday Be A Part Of The “Bride Of Christ”

*“Would to God ye could bear with me a little in [my] folly: and indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for **I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present [you as] a chaste virgin to Christ.** But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or [if] ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with [him].” (2 Corinthians 11:1-4)*

Paul, as missionary, played a very important role in the founding of the church at Corinth. Here, he is telling the church that he has labored to give the church the truths of God so that they might remain faithful to the Lord. This would result in them standing before the Lord on the last day as a faithful bride awaiting to partake of a new level of communion with the Lord throughout eternity. Much like a bride on her wedding day is prepared to experience new forms of intimacy with her husband...

*“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: **for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.** And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed [are] they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.” (Revelation 19:7-9)*

This takes place when all of the saints gather and commune with the Lord. At this future event, they will be a local assembled body of believers (in other words, a local assembly located in heaven). They will stand before Him, ready to be united with Him to enjoy a new level of communion, worship and service to Him...

*“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, **To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven,** and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,” (Hebrews 12:22-23)*

*"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. **For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so [let] the wives [be] to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh."***  
(Ephesians 5:22-31)

Here, the Lord's leadership and authority over the local church is in view. The church should be in submission to the leadership of Christ, serving Him as His helpmeet. This is compared to the wife in a marriage being in submission to her husband as he leads the family to obey Christ above all else and then making decisions that put her needs and desires before his own as he loves her as Christ loves the assembly.

Note in this text we clearly see the purpose of Christ's death for His assemblies described...  
*"even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,"*

in other words, it is through His death that the church assembly can receive the forgiveness of the sins of the assembly and be sanctified and prepared for His use and to be spotless before Him on the last day. ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS THAT COME UPON INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS, AND LOCAL ASSEMBLIES, COME THROUGH THE WORK OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS. The cross of Christ is the channel through which all blessings flow.

## **THE SUMMARY:**

In this lesson we have seen several truths about the Lord's local assemblies presented to us:

It is the:

1. "The Pillar and Ground Of The Truth" - The local assembly holds up (pillar) and supports (foundation) the truths of God's Word.
2. "The House Of God" - The church is a meeting place for the Lord and His family.
3. "The Flock Of God" - The Lord leads, feeds and protects His assembly and the Lord died for His assembly.
4. "The Body Of Christ" - A unity exists between the individual members of the assembly, arising from a joint need one of another. The church is to follow the directions of the Lord.
5. "A Candlestick" - The assembly holds forth the light of God's Word in the midst of a sin darkened world around us and enjoys a close relationship with Christ.
6. "The Bride Of Christ" - The final gathering of believers before the Lord will be like a faithful bride awaiting to partake of a new level of communion with her spouse (the Lord). The Lord died so that the church could be sanctified and stand before Him spotless upon entrance into eternity with Him.

Why should we join with and support a local assembly of believers? Because of its close intimate relation with Christ and its six-fold unique role of service to the Lord.

**May the Lord bless us as we seek His truth.**



## **Summary Of This Study**

## The Importance Of The Local Church -13

### ***"Summary Of Our Study"***

**"...The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)**

In this final lesson of our study let's quickly review all that we have looked at and attempt to apply these truths to our lives in a practical way.

### **THE STUDY:**

Here is a listing of all the main truths we have learned in this study on the Lord's local assemblies...

- The Nature Of The Assembly
- The Local, Visible, Called Out Assembly
- The Benefits Of The Assembly
- The Existence Of The Assembly
- The Foundation Of The Assembly
- The Mission Of The Assembly
- The Great Commission
- Evangelizing The Lost
- Baptizing The New Believer
- Instructing The Membership
- The Other Truths About The Assembly
- The Blessings Of The Assembly
- The Accrediting Of The Assembly
- The Attendance Of The Assembly
- The Metaphors Of The Assembly

In all of these areas one basic principle was seen repeatedly... The local assembly of the Lord, His church, is THE distinctive assembly that was created and authorized to bring honor and glory to God through our Lord Jesus Christ...

***"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him [be] glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."***  
*(Ephesians 3:20-21)*

Even beyond that, our study has shown us that, due to the unique nature and authority of the Lord's assembly, it enjoys a very special, intimate relationship with Christ...

***"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."*** *(Matthew 18:20)*

What a wonderful promise the Lord gives to those who are members of His assembly. It doesn't matter how large or small the assembly, when God's people gather to worship Him in spirit and in truth, He promises to meet with them in a very special, intimate way. He does this in the person of the Holy Spirit that not only indwells the body of the individual believer, but also indwells the assembly as the body of Christ.

It is very important to notice three basic principles in this text:

1. First of all, this is describing those who are "gathered together". If we study this phrase, we find it is translated from a Greek word that means "to be led, or brought, together". This isn't simply a group of Christians that are meeting together. It is clearly saying that these Christians are led, or drawn, by the leadership of the Spirit to this meeting.
2. Secondly, when it speaks of the Lord being in "the midst" of them. This phrase is teaching us that, when God's people are led by the Holy Spirit to meet together, He will be "right in the middle of things". He will be actively involved in all that is taking place, working in a way that supercedes His normal workings in the world around us.
3. Thirdly, this gathering is in "the name" of Christ. This phrase is speaking to us about the motivation behind this assembly. These saints, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, are meeting in alignment with Christ's will with a desire to honor, glorify, and worship God. It is not to promote nor exalt themselves, nor their assembly, but it is a meeting that is centered on bringing to God all the glory, honor and praise.

One more important point that is normally missed concerns the nature of the assembly that is being described. Normally, we have a tendency to apply this text to all believers who meet together to worship or serve Him in any way. In the mind of many, this is not limited to a local church assembly of members.

Please keep in mind:

1. first of all, we have already seen that this gathering must take place as the result of following the leading of the Holy Spirit, motivated to glorify God alone. It is not just a random assemblage of Christians.
2. more importantly, we must note the context of this passage to properly understand the assembly of which this speaks.

In the context (Matt 18:15-17) the subject of local church discipline is being addressed. It speaks of two disagreeing individuals, who are both under the authority of the local church. This text is explaining the process where their differences are to be resolved, or if not resolved, the local church discipline that should be enacted....

***"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear [thee, then] take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell [it] unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican..."***

In the very near context, the authority of the local assembly is affirmed. Not only does the local church have the authority to discipline its members, but also to discern the will of God and powerfully intercede according to His will, is confirmed in (Matt 18:18-19)...

***“Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.”***

Then, the source of the great authority of the local church assembly is described as the special presence of the Lord. As the Lord uniquely meets with His people, they are enabled to perceive His will as an assembly, and then act according to that will in worship, prayer and at times, unfortunately, the exercise of disciplinary proceedings (Matthew 18:20)...

***“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”***

## **THE SUMMARY:**

In this 13 part study, we have attempted to look at a few of the reasons why a Christian should seek out and join an assembly of the Lord when it is possible to do so. In the midst of all the previous reasons we have listed, the greatest reason of all is found in our study today...

We, as Christians, are to join and actively support the ministry of the local church of the Lord because of the church's ONE OF A KIND, intimate relationship with its Founder, Sustainer and Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Nowhere else on earth can this profound connection with Jesus Christ be found...

***“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. DRAW NIGH TO GOD, AND HE WILL DRAW NIGH TO YOU.”*** (James 4:7-8)

**May the Lord bless us as we seek His truth.**

# **Addendum: The Church Universal, Local, Or Both?**

## ***"The Church: Universal, Local, Or Both?"***

*"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him [be] glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21)*

(Please note: I apologize for the length and detail of this posting, and to be honest, I realize it will not be easily consumed by some of its readers. I normally do not post articles of this length or depth, but I feel obligated to write this posting based upon feedback I have received from the *Importance Of The Local Assembly* series that was recently published. So for the many who have shown interest and/or curiosity on this subject, here is the information you have requested. My apology to those who lack interest or the time to read this study. It is understandable.)

Facts about the word "church" as used in the King James Version of the Bible....

1. The word "church" is not used in the Old Testament.
2. The word "church" is used in 111 verses in the New Testament.
3. Every occurrence of the word "church" is translated from the Greek word "ekklesia" in the NT.

In this study, I would like to study the definition and contextual usage of this Greek word "ekklesia", with the intent of answering the following questions...

"When the Bible speaks of a "church" is it referring to an invisible, universal assembly made up of all believers in Christ;.... or, is it referring to visible, local assembly whose membership is limited to baptized believers;.... or, does the Bible speak of both types of "churches" that are differentiated by the context in which they are used?"

Let us all ask the Lord for grace, a spirit open to truth, clarity of thought, and accuracy as we work our way through the Holy Scriptures...

### **THE SCRIPTURES:**

- A. (Matthew 16:16-20);
- B. (Act 2:42-47); (Act 7:37-41); (Act 12:1-4); (Act 15:1-4); (Act 19:29-34); (Act 19:35-41); (Act 20:17-28)
- C. (Romans 16:21-24)
- D. (1 Corinth 6:1-5); (1 Corinth 10:24-33); (1 Corinth 11:19-24); (1 Corinth 12:27-31); (1 Corinth 15:1-11)
- E. (Galatians 1:11-13)
- F. (Ephesians 1:16-23); (Ephesians 3:8-12); (Ephesians 3:14-21); (Ephesians 5:22-33)
- G. (Philippians 3:4-6)
- H. (Colossians 1:14-29)
- I. (1 Timothy 3:14-16); (1 Timothy 5:9-16)
- J. (Hebrews 2:10-13)
- K. (James 5:12-18)
- L. (3 John 1:5-10)

## **THE STUDY:**

### **A basic principle used in this study:**

You must take the normal, usual usage and meaning of a word unless the context CLEARLY DICTATES ANOTHER MEANING is ABSOLUTELY necessary.

Let me use an example of the word "ball". We all have a basic understanding of the definition and usage of the word "ball"... It is a round or oblong object that is many times used in sports and children's play (something like that).

My point is this.... Every language on earth is based upon this basic principle. If we don't use the common usage and definition for words, then language becomes unintelligible. For example, when we hear the word "ball" we automatically assume we are talking about the round object described above. Let's pretend that this rule should not be followed....

If we did not keep to this rule... a "ball" can mean a watermelon, a boy, a target, a tree, a fox, a girl, a planet, a star.... etc etc etc . We could never come to an understanding of the word if every time it is used it can hold a varied, different meaning. If this is the case, think about this sentence...

#### ***"He saw the ball".***

This sentence then becomes absolutely meaningless. The context reveals nothing about the definition of the "ball", therefore the word "ball" could stand for ANYTHING. The sentence holds no meaning for us. For language to hold meaning, we must take the common usage and definition of a word and apply it to the sentence.

The only time that this rule does not apply is when the THE CONTEXT FORCES US to find another meaning. Only if the context absolutely forbids the common meaning of a word do we seek another definition. Let me give us two sentences where the word "ball" is used:

1. ***"He lost the ball in the weeds."*** – in this example, we can see that our definition of the word "ball" easily fits the context. Therefore, we automatically know its definition. THERE IS NO REASON TO find another definition for "ball".
2. ***"The ball of his foot gave him great pain."*** – In this context, "ball" cannot have the normal usage and definition we are using. Therefore, we look for another definition. In this case, it would be a round area found on the bottom of our foot. How did we know to find another definition for "ball"? There is no possible way that our definition of "ball" could fit the context, therefore, we were FORCED to look for another.

This is the core principle upon which this study is based. Both the details, and conclusion, of this study rest heavily upon this principle. We will be finding the common, basic usage and definition of "ekklesia" as found in the Scriptures, and then attempt to consistently apply that meaning to each text.

### **The common definition of the word "ekklesia":**

- 1) The Greek word from which the word "church" is translated is ALWAYS the word "ekklesia". "Ekklesia" is made up of two parts.... "ek" and "kaleo".
  - a) "ek" holds the idea of "out of" or "from" (implies separation)
  - b) "kaleo" holds the idea of "to be called", or "to be summoned"

c) Therefore the basic meaning of "ekklesia" is "called out from", or "to separate by summons".

If we simply use this definition for "ekklesia" we can see how it could refer to either a universal invisible assembly of believers, or a local visible assembly of baptized believers ....

1. When the lost are saved, they are called to salvation by the Spirit, and separated from the sinful world to the service of Christ. (1 Peter 2:9) In this sense "ekklesia" could be referring to an invisible, universal body that contains all believers
2. When a believer is baptized and enters the Lord's local church, they are summoned (led) by the Spirit and are separated from the sinful world and other believers. They become members of a particular, unified, local assembly that brings honor to God. (Acts 2:41-47) In this sense, "ekklesia" could be referring to a visible, local assembly of baptized believers.

Therefore, based upon the definition of "ekklesia", we find no indication of which type of assembly we are speaking of whenever we find the word being used.

However, this is only half of our "equation". Next we have to look at the USAGE of the word "ekklesia" in the Holy Bible.

### **The common usage of the word "ekklesia":**

- 1) If we study the Biblical usage of "ekklesia" we find something very interesting that will be a great benefit to our study...
  - a) The word "ekklesia" is used in 112 verses in the Bible. To the best of my ability, as I looked at every reference using ekklesia...
  - b) I found that in 80 verses or more, the word clearly, in its context, MUST mean "a local visible assembly".
  - c) There were at the most, 32 verses when it could POSSIBLY mean "an invisible universal assembly" (you can see a list of these questionable verses under the above heading "THE SCRIPTURES" found earlier in this posting.)

So based on the above, I am forced to conclude that the common usage of the term in the NT is "local visible assembly". This definition clearly applies in at least 80 verses (that's over 70 percent of the time) the word is used. There was only, at the most, 32 verses that it could mean a invisible, universal assembly (that's less than 30%).

(Please note: In the 32 texts I have included several, I believe, that strongly lean towards the local visible definition. But for the completeness of this study, I included them in the "questionable" category.

If we remove those texts, the actual number of questionable texts would have been 21 (less than 20%). Therefore, I believe, the word "ekklesia" means a local assembly more than 80% of the time, compared to "ekklesia" possibly referring to a universal invisible assembly less that 20% of the time.

Therefore, for this study, we will be using THE COMMON DEFINITION OF "EKKLESIA" WILL BE "A LOCAL VISIBLE ASSEMBLY".

Based upon our earlier discussion under the heading "A basic principle used in this study" This will be our process...

1. We will look at the context of each of the 32 Scriptures where "ekklesia" could mean an "invisible universal assembly".
2. We will see if each one could allow us to use our common definition a "local visible assembly" .
3. If the context allows "ekklesia" to hold to its common definition, that will be the definition we assign to that text.
4. If the context forbids that the common definition of ekklesia can be used, we will then attempt to determine the definition of "ekklesia" for that text.



### **A verse by verse study of the "questionable" texts that use the word "ekklesia":**

*"And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed [it] unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my **church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.*

*(Matthew 16:16-20)*

#### The exposition:

Here we find the Lord speaking to Peter, emphasizing the veracity, and importance, of the statement "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God". He then explains the great authority that he will give, and is now held by, the local assembly as they proclaim the gospel message to the lost. For those who accept the gospel message by faith, they will be "just as saved" as if Christ Himself had delivered the message to lost person. Likewise those who reject the gospel message delivered by the local assembly, will be just as greatly condemned to judgment as if Christ Himself had delivered the message to them.

#### The usage of "ekklesia"

There is nothing in the context that dictates that the term "church" cannot mean a local assembly. Therefore we will look no further.

(Please note: In this case, the word "church" is used in a *generalized* sense. This means that the statement "upon this rock I will build my church" was not pointed toward a specific local assembly, but will apply to any assembly of that type. Much like the statement "the duck is a bird that quacks" does not refer to a specific duck but it refers to any bird of that type.)

*"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added [unto them] about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all [men], as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the **church** daily such as should be saved."*

*(Acts 2:41-47)*

#### The exposition:

Here, we find the church at Jerusalem being increased in membership and unity. Following their baptism and church membership, they enjoyed times of worship through the teaching of God's Word, fellowship with the saints, observing the Lord's supper, and communal prayer and self-sacrifice for the welfare of the other members. Also, to accredit this newly formed entity, we find the apostles working many signs and wonders...proof the God had authorized this assembly and her message.

#### The usage of "ekklesia"

Clearly, the context dictates that the word "church" is referring to the Lord's local assembly that continued to grow as the lost were saved and joined the assembly. Since church can easily mean a local visible assembly we need to look no further for another definition.

*"This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the **church** in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and [with] our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust [him] from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for [as for] this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands."*

*(Acts 7:37-41)*

The exposition:

This text is an account of an event that took place during the wilderness wanderings of the nation of Israel. As the nation of Israel traveled through the wilderness, they were an organized, visible assembly that had been called out of Egypt, separated to worship and obey God.

The usage of "ekklesia"

Again, clearly this is speaking of a local, visible assembly of God's people. No other definition needs to be sought.

*"Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth [his] hands to vex certain of the **church**. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put [him] in prison, and delivered [him] to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. 5) Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the **church** unto God for him..... 12) And when he had considered [the thing], he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.*

*(Acts 12:1-5,12)*

The exposition:

The martyrdom of the local church of Jerusalem's members included James. Herod also went after Peter (another member of the local assembly). Peter was imprisoned and the local church then prayed for him.

The usage of "ekklesia"

We know that the local church (vs 5) is described as praying for him... in verse twelve, we are told many were gathered praying, which is describing the local visible assembly at prayer. The church in vs 1, when kept in the context of vs 5 and 12, clearly is referring to a local assembly. Once again our rule applies. Since the vs1 can mean a local assembly, and we know the church in vs 5 is speaking of a local assembly, then we have no need to find any other definition for either term.

*"And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, [and said], Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the **church**, they passed through Phenice and*

*Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the **church**, and [of] the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.”*  
(Acts 15:1-4)

The exposition:

The church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to consult the Apostles and Elders of the church at Jerusalem. They traveled back to Jerusalem and were received by the local church there.

The usage of “ekklesia”

“church” in both verses, can easily be speaking of the local assemblies in those areas. No reason to search for another definition.

*“And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring [him] that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the **assembly** was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great [is] Diana of the Ephesians.”* (Acts 19:29-34)

*“And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, [Ye] men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the [image] which fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful **assembly**. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the **assembly**.”* (Acts 19:35-41)

The exposition:

Here we read of a political assembly that was gathered to hold a makeshift trial and persecute Gaius and Aristarchus in defense of the Goddess Diana.

The usage of “ekklesia”

Here, the word “ekklesia” is translated “assembly” and is speaking of a local visible assembly of Greek citizens.

*“And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the **church**. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: [And] how I kept back nothing that was profitable [unto you], but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I [am] pure from the blood of all [men]. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the*

*counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the **church** of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” (Acts 20:17-28)*

The exposition:

Paul calls for a meeting of the elders of the local church at Ephesus. They travel to Paul, and Paul then speaks to them about his persecution, imprisonment and missionary ministry. He then emphasizes to them his ministry to their church (the local church at Ephesus) and emphasizes the need for them to watch over and feed the church of Ephesus over which they have been placed.

The usage of “ekklesia”

In my mind, both times the “church” is mentioned, it is clear that a local assembly is being spoken of. If you notice they are given the responsibility to feed and watch over “the church”. This cannot be speaking of a universal, invisible assembly, for it would be impossible to feed and watch over all Christians on the face of the planet earth. However, it is very easy, and obvious, for them to watch over and feed the local assembly where they were ministering. No need to look further for another definition.

*“Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you. I Tertius, who wrote [this] epistle, salute you in the Lord. Gaius mine host, and of the whole **church**, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you all. Amen.” (Romans 16:21-24)*

The exposition:

Paul is writing on behalf on several different Christians (Timotheus, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, Tertius (as penman), Gaius, Erastus, and Quartus. Paul goes further and speaks on behalf of the local assembly at Corinth.

The usage of “ekklesia”

Could Paul speak on behalf of all the believers everywhere on earth? I think not. Note the phrase “whole church” is used elsewhere to describe local assemblies (Acts 15:22 – at Jerusalem; 1 Cor 14:23 – at Corinth)

*“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the **church**. I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?” (1 Corinthians 6:1-5)*

The exposition:

Paul, here is encouraging believers who are involved in a dispute to allow the local assembly to make a judgment and not to rely upon the world’s judicial system.

The usage of “ekklesia”

Would it be possible for the universal, invisible church to make a judgment about saints’ disagreements? I don’t know how that could ever be done. Would Christians be able to bring their disputes before a local assembly for judgment... Absolutely. It could be easily done.

*"Let no man seek his own, but every man another's [wealth]. Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, [that] eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth [is] the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. If any of them that believe not bid you [to a feast], and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth [is] the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another [man's] conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the **church** of God: Even as I please all [men] in all [things], not seeking mine own profit, but the [profit] of many, that they may be saved. (1 Corinthians 10:24-33)*

The exposition:

Paul gives a listing or areas of concern for the Christian desiring to possess a proper public testimony for Christ. This involves care concerning covetousness, eating habits, hospitality and social behaviors, limiting our Christian liberties for the sake of others, honoring God in all things that are done, then he makes the statement...

*"Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the **church** of God: Even as I please all [men] in all [things], not seeking mine own profit, but the [profit] of many, that they may be saved."*

In other words, we are to take care not to offend those around us. This includes being a good testimony to both Jew and Gentile. Also, it includes being in proper submission to the local assembly and not offend them, it is the local church whose responsibility it is to take the gospel to the lost world.

Whatever church we are a member of, we should be in submission to their authority helping them to fulfill the Great Commission through our life testimony.

By doing all of these things, we are exhibiting a humble attitude of a life lived in ministry for the good of others.

The usage of "ekklesia"

Church is used in the generalized sense. Whatever church we are a member of, we should be in submission to their authority which enhances our testimony and the unity of the church as it takes the gospel to the world. Again, this makes perfect sense, and therefore we have no need to seek another definition.

*For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come together therefore into one place, [this] is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before [other] his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the **church** of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise [you] not. For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the [same] night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake [it], and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. (1 Corinthians 11:19-24)*

The exposition:

Here, Paul is giving the local church at Corinth instructions on how to observe the church ordinance of communion. By partaking of the supper in a selfish fashion the church member is despising the local assembly who holds authority over the ordinance.

The usage of "ekklesia"

Contextually, it is quite clear Paul is instructing a local assembly that has the authority to observe the Lord's Supper.

*"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also [is] Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether [we be] Jews or Gentiles, whether [we be] bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body [were] an eye, where [were] the hearing? If the whole [were] hearing, where [were] the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where [were] the body? But now [are they] many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those [members] of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely [parts] have more abundant comeliness. For our comely [parts] have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that [part] which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but [that] the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the **church**, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. [Are] all apostles? [are] all prophets? [are] all teachers? [are] all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way."*  
(1 Corinthians 12:12-31)

#### The exposition:

Paul is addressing the local assembly at Corinth. He is describing them as the "body of Christ". This teaches us that the local church although made up of many different members is to work together in harmony to do the bidding of its head, Jesus Christ. Paul describes the offices of the local assembly and some of the gifts the Lord placed within that assembly for its spiritual growth and accrediting. Finally, to emphasize the need for selflessness and unity, he reminds them to earnestly desire to exercise the "best gifts"... ie the gifts most needed by the assembly.

Also, if you notice in vs 13 membership in this assembly is gained by the Holy Spirit leading us to be baptized in water. (The word translated "by" is also translated "through" in Greek). This is saying that...  
"Through (the leadership of) the Spirit, we are all baptized into one type of body." (It is a local assembly that declares God's truths and fulfills the Great Commission.)

This membership is offered to both Jew and Gentile, slave or master. There is no difference between a local church filled with Gentiles and a local church filled with Jews. Nor is there a difference between the membership of the rich and the membership of the slave. They hold to the same set of doctrines and have the same mission.... The Great Commission. No matter what their nationality and social standing each member has the same privileges and responsibilities of membership.

#### The usage of "ekklesia"

The church is being described in the generalized sense here. Only a local assembly could accomplish what Paul is describing in vs 13-31. It is impossible for members of an invisible worldwide body of believers to work together in harmony and meet each other's needs as being described in these verses.

Once again, as in every text so far, there is nothing in this text to dictate that the "church" that is mentioned cannot be a local assembly. Therefore, there is no need to search for another meaning.

*"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the*

*scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the **church** of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace [which was bestowed] upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore whether [it were] I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.”*  
(1 Corinthians 15:1-11)

11) But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

12) For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught [it], but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

13) For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the **church** of God, and wasted it:

(Galatians 1:11-13)

#### The exposition:

Here, Paul is sharing the details of the gospel message, in the context of his personal testimony to the local church at Corinth, and the local church at Galatia. He is emphasizing proofs that the gospel message is true, the great number of witnesses to the resurrection and the changed life he experienced after his receipt of the gospel by faith.

As a part of his testimony, Paul describes his past life (prior to his salvation) which included the persecution of members of the local church at Jerusalem. This is described in Acts 7:54-8:5 – this account includes the martyrdom of Stephen, and other believers living in the confines of Jerusalem. There is no reason to believe these were not members of the local church at Jerusalem)

#### The usage of “ekkleisia”

There is no reason why the “church” mentioned in Paul’s testimony was not the local church at Jerusalem. No need to look further.

*“Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what [is] the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set [him] at his own right hand in the heavenly [places], Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:*

*And hath put all [things] under his feet, and gave him [to be] the head over all [things] to the **church**, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”*

(Ephesians 1:16-23)

#### The exposition:

Paul is describing his prayerful desires for the local church at Ephesus. Some of those desires include understanding: the truth of His Word, their calling, what eternity holds for them, His great attributes, and the exalted position of Christ. This exalted position includes: being placed above all worldly powers, all creation, and being placed as Head of the local assembly.

Christ’s exaltation over the local assembly is described as being made “head” over the “body”, the church.

(For further details on this phraseology please refer to our prior study of the 1 Corinthians 12 passage.) Paul then continues by explaining that it is within the confines of the local assembly that Jesus will meet with His people in His fullness.

This is supported by Matthew 18:20 –

*“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”*

This text is speaking about the meeting of God's people in a local church assembly (Matt 18:15-19).

#### The usage of "ekklesia"

The local church is clearly described as the Lord's body as already seen in our study. The entire context clearly fits the description of a local assembly. No need to look further.

*Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all [men] see what [is] the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly [places] might be known by the **church** the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. (Ephesians 3:8-12)*

#### The exposition:

The reason that Paul acted as a missionary, being instrumental in the founding and instruction of the first local churches, was so that these churches could present Christ and His Word to both men and angels.

This section of Scripture presents the same truth as the account of the Great Commission found in Mark... *"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."* (Mark 16:15-16)

When the gospel is preached by the local assembly, all of creation, including the angels of God learn of the wisdom of God. Keep in mind, we are told that angels attend the meeting of local churches and learn from the preaching of the Word. (1 Cor 11:10, 1 Pet 1:10-12)

The use of local assemblies to proclaim truth about Christ and His work on our behalf is a part of His eternal plan.

#### The usage of "ekklesia"

Here, the preaching of the Word by the local church, and the benefits of that preaching extend to both men and angels and is supported by a variety of Scriptures. The local church can easily be understood in this passage.

*For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what [is] the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him [be] glory in the **church** by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (Ephesians 3:14-21)*

#### The exposition:

Paul's prayerful desires for the local church at Ephesus is explained in detail... receipt of His eternal riches, His strength through the Spirit, salvation from sins, a foundation of love, an understanding of the love of Christ, filled with the fullness of God.

Paul then explains the obligation of the church to glorify God for granting them these blessings. God is to be glorified by the local assembly through the work and intervention of Christ in their personal lives and worship services, until the end of the age.



### The usage of "ekklesia"

Paul is addressing the local assembly, explaining to them the blessings of God that can be received by them and their obligation to praise Him for those blessings. Clearly, in the context, this is speaking of a local assembly.

*"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the **church**: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the **church** is subject unto Christ, so [let] the wives [be] to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the **church**, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious **church**, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the **church**: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the **church**. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife [see] that she reverence [her] husband."*  
(Ephesians 5:22-33)

### The exposition:

Here we find Christ's relationship with His local assemblies being likened to the relationship between a husband and a wife. Some of these likenesses include: the church's need of submission to Christ as their head (1 Cor 12:12-31); the husband's need to sacrifice himself for the wife, always putting her welfare above his own, motivated by love (Acts 20:28); the very special intimate union that takes place between Christ and the local assembly (Matt 18:20, Rev 1:13-20).

### The usage of "ekklesia"

The word "church" is used in the generalized sense. The concept of a local assembly fits very nicely in the context. No need to look further.

*"Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."*  
(Philippians 3:4-6)

### The exposition:

Paul speaking of the persecution of the local assembly at Jerusalem of which he has spoken earlier. See 1 Cor 15:1-11 and Galatians 1:11-13)

### The usage of "ekklesia"

Church refers to the local assembly at Jerusalem.

*"In whom we have redemption through his blood, [even] the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether [they be] thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for*

*him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the **church**: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all [things] he might have the preeminence. For it pleased [the Father] that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, [I say], whether [they be] things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in [your] mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and [be] not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, [and] which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the **church**: Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; [Even] the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what [is] the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.*  
(Colossians 1:14-29)

#### The exposition:

Christ's (who was God Himself) great work, power and authority being described. Because of His faithfulness to the calling of His Father to give His life, Jesus is exalted as head of the local assembly. Christ's work involved making a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that we might serve Him.

Our faithful service to Him is our supreme call to holiness and spirituality. Because of his desire to keep this calling, Paul is thankful for the privilege of being persecuted, which allows him to have be a living sacrifice for the Lord. He is making this sacrifice to be of benefit to the local assemblies to whom he is ministering.

The local assemblies benefit from his ministry by receiving his teachings on the mystery of Christ, His person, work, and the eternity He has prepared for us. Paul's great desire is that the local church might learn from his teachings, then fulfill their commission to indoctrinate their members so that they might grow in grace and knowledge and win others to Christ.

#### The usage of "ekklesia"

The "church" is used in the generalized sense. It is referring to any local assembly to whom Paul has ministered. The local assembly can easily fit this context, therefore no need to look further.

*"These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the **church** of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."*  
(1 Timothy 3:14-16)

#### The exposition:

Paul is instructing Timothy, the young pastor of a local church. He is explaining to Timothy the importance of teaching the truth to the members of the assembly. The local assembly is the storehouse of the truths of God in New Testament times. Here, the local assembly is described as: the "house of God", it is where God's people meet for intimate worship, communion and nourishment from His Word; and the "pillar and ground of the truth", the assembly that has been authorized to "hold up the truth for all to see" and "defend the truth so it cannot be moved, nor go out of existence".

#### The usage of "ekklesia"

The local church easily fits the context here. No need to look further.

*"Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work. But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith. And withal they learn [to be] idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some are already turned aside after Satan. If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the **church** be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed."*  
(1 Timothy 5:9-16)

#### The exposition:

Paul is instructing Timothy on the proper administration of permanent church aid to widows within the local assembly. They were to only aid those who were 60 years old and faithful to Christ. He warns that, at times, younger widows can turn from the service of Christ and live carnal lives characterized by fleshly pursuits. Paul says, instead of receiving younger widows into the group receiving permanent church support, they should remarry, be supported by their new husband, and raise children that honor God. Also, those widows with Christian families still living are to look to them for financial aid, apart from aid from the local assembly.

#### The usage of "ekklesia"

The local assembly is clearly in view here, based upon the nature of the instructions given to Timothy. Timothy has absolutely no authority over a universal, invisible assembly of believers and also it is impossible for a universal assembly, as a body, to support anyone. The local assembly easily fits in this context.

*"For it became him, for whom [are] all things, and by whom [are] all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified [are] all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the **church** will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me."*  
(Hebrews 2:10-13)

#### The exposition:

Christ's exultation following His perfect obedience on the cross is being described. His death on the cross resulted in our sanctification and adoption into His family. The local church membership is made up of individuals who have adopted into the family of God, His brethren.

A prophecy found in Psalm 22:22 promises that Christ would sing praises to His Father in the midst of the assembly. These praises were another act of Christ's submission and obedience. He chose to glorify and honor His Father in heaven, instead of praising Himself through song. This prophecy was fulfilled when Christ sang during the local church meeting that was called to observe the Lord's supper...

*"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed [it], and brake [it], and gave [it] to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave [it] to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives."*  
(Matthew 26:26-30)

#### The usage of "ekklesia"

Clearly, the singing of Christ was performed during a local church assembly. No need to look further.

*"But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and [your] nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation. Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the **church**; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess [your] faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.*

*(James 5:12-18)*

#### The exposition:

We have described instructions for Christians touching upon many different life situations: Do not swear nor take oaths, simply speak honestly and cultivate and honest testimony among all; when afflicted, seek the Lord's grace and intervention through prayer; when merry, show your joy to others through songs that honor the Lord; when sick, call the elders of the local assembly and receive their prayers and application of oil (commonly used for symbolic anointing and medication); when committed sin has become public, publically confess the sin and ask for prayer of other members of the local assembly. Why do all this? Because prayer is a powerful thing, especially when the prayer is performed in the context of a local church meeting....

*"Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:19-20)*

#### The usage of "ekklesia"

The word "church" used in the generalized sense. In other words... "whatever local church of which you are a member". The above actions can only be performed in the context of a local assembly of believers. Who would the elders of a universal church be? How can the elders of a universal church all meet in one place? How can we confess our public sins to the universal church? Etc etc... Obviously, this is a local assembly being talked about.

*"Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; Which have borne witness of thy charity before the **church**: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth. I wrote unto the **church**: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth [them] out of the **church**."*

*(3 John 1:5-10)*

#### The exposition:

Here John is addressing Gaius, who faithfully ministered to others. John reviews the faithful acts of Gaius. Firstly, he reminded Gaius of his faithful ministering to his family and spiritual brothers and also to strangers. Those he had helped had then gone before the local assembly and told of his charitable deeds.

John encourages Gaius to continue to help other Christians whom may come his way during their travels. By helping those Christians, he shares in the ministry they are performing.

John had written to the local church to encourage them to help the traveling Christians, but Diotrephes, due to his desire for attention, did not receive the travelers. But instead, he forbade the other members of the local assembly to help these traveling ones. If a member chose to help the travelers, he would cast them out of the local assembly. John says that when he arrives at this church he would deal with the situation.

#### The usage of "ekklesia"

Easily, we can see a local church must be being talked about. A letter cannot be sent to an invisible world-wide assembly. Christians cannot come before a universal assembly and speak of blessings they had received, they cannot be cast out of a universal assembly, nor can one person forbid all living Christians to do anything. Obviously this speaks of the local assembly in Gaius' area.

#### **Please take notice:**

**Any text that you do not see listed (unless I misread it) clearly indicate the word church is a local assembly. For example the phrase "church at Jerusalem" clearly is referring to the local church at Jerusalem. Also there may be a few instances where the context clearly indicated a local assembly was in view like "the church that is in thy house" which clearly disallows the universal church usage. I saw no reason to include these types of texts in the discussion we are having.**

## **THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION:**

As you can see, based upon my understanding of these Scriptures, there is not one text found in the Bible that dictates we must view the Biblical concept of a church as "an invisible universal assembly".

Certainly we know that all who are saved make up "the family of God", "the kingdom of God", and "the saints", however, the more I look into this subject, I am hesitant to refer to all who are saved as "the church of God".

Why is this an important issue? I believe there is much to be learned about a local assembly that previously have been missed by attributing texts to all who are saved, when they correctly apply to local assemblies.

The role and importance of the local assembly is enhanced through this understanding of the meaning of the word "church" as found in the New Testament Scriptures. As a matter of fact, the local assembly when viewed from this perspective, becomes the supreme instrument of the Lord in the proclamation, retention and defense of the truth of the Word.

There is no other organization on the face of the planet earth that comes close to holding the authority, purpose and value to the cause of Christ than His local churches on earth. How can we begin to take the local assembly so lightly?

**Let me remind you that I have tried to find every section of Scripture where the word "church" could be referring to an invisible assembly. If, during your studies, you find any other text that could refer to a universal church... Please let me know. For my own use, and the benefit of those who read this study, I would like this study to be as complete as possible.**

**Also, if you see things in the context of the above passages that you believe absolutely disallow the local assembly definition of "church" please let me know by comment or email. Again, I certainly am a fallen, sinful, human who is capable of misunderstanding a context or entirely missing it, therefore it is very possible I have missed something in this study. Please point it out to me so I can study and, hopefully, come to an understanding of the issue and then address it in a future comment.**

May the Lord bless you as you seek His truth.