

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

Mike Fehlauer

We've talked about the principles that govern meditating on the Scriptures, and the process and power of renewing our minds in the Word of God. Now I want to talk to you about another very important aspect of being a disciple and making disciples, which is the place and purpose of the local church in our lives. In the Scriptures, there's not a specific verse or even a commandment that talks about the local church as we know it today.

Let me explain what I mean by that so you won't think I'm teaching heresy. This is the age of the local church. In the Bible, most of Paul's letters start either by saying "to the saints" or "to the brethren" at a given city. Back then there was only one church in each city, for a lot of reasons. Culturally, there were many dynamics that were different then than they are now, but God's heart has never changed. There is one church. Anyone who has received Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, been filled with God, and born again has become a part of the church (the body of Christ) as a whole, collectively and universally. Today, there are local expressions of the universal or corporate church in any particular city—for example we are in Colorado Springs where there are hundreds of different churches—and many of these are life-giving, powerful, Jesus-exalting, healthy churches. They are expressions of the overall church, but there are different pastors who have separate congregations.

I believe it is very important to understand the place of the local church in our lives. Ephesians 4:10-11 says, "He, who descended is also the One [One is capitalized as referring to Jesus] who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. And He himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (NKJV). Basically, this Scripture mentions what we refer to as five offices or functions that are filled within the body of Christ. The purpose of these offices is to equip and empower the saints—which includes the rest of the body of Christ—for the work of the ministry so that the entire body is edified. I know that can be done, especially with today's technology, through videos, television, tapes, and books, but it's also created and designed by God to be done within the local church setting. It's very important for us to understand and take advantage of these five offices which are called gifts in the Scriptures. They are gifts Jesus has given to us because it is His desire that through them the expression of His life would bring us into a place of ministry and cause us to be empowered to serve Him effectively.

There are a lot of dynamics involved in being part of a local church. First of all, we are taking advantage of those gifts and giving ourselves over to that teaching. Acts 2:42 is a really powerful Scripture regarding the early church. It says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and prayers." I really believe all these are elements of a powerful, effective church. They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine. They placed value on the gift of the apostles and gave themselves over to it by gathering with their brothers and sisters in the Lord to listen to their teachings. That's part of discipleship—giving ourselves over to the doctrine and teaching that comes from the gifts God has given us. Then it says they gave themselves to fellowship, the dynamic of relating and fellowshiping with one another in breaking bread and in prayer. This was a tremendous formula for the church to move in power in the early days.

There's also another dynamic involved in being part of a local church, that is, learning how to be part of a community and to submit, serve, and love each other. We need to persevere, and learn to like each other even when we get on each other's nerves and when we think we can't stand each other any longer. There's tremendous growth in learning how to relate to each other, how to function as a body, and what it means to commit ourselves beyond a place of convenience. Being part of a local church creates an atmosphere and an environment for us to begin to do that, to learn how to commit to each other and take advantage of the gifts—apostle, pastor, prophet, evangelist, and teacher. For us to grow as Christians, it's vital and imperative to be involved in a local church.

I'm not saying that if you're not involved in a local church, you're not a Christian. I'm not saying you're not going to heaven. I'm not even saying God can't use you. All I'm saying is that you are missing a very important powerful dynamic in your relationship with God and learning to relate with other believers. In the local church setting, you have an opportunity to be involved in a common goal or vision that particular church might have, to give yourself over and learn how to work and serve in that area. In the Bible, Philip became a tremendous evangelist, and he started in the church at Jerusalem waiting on tables and serving. God was looking for someone He could promote, and he went to those that were serving the rest of the body and touched their lives. He promoted Stephen and Philip. Stephen became the first martyr recorded in the Scriptures and Philip became a powerful evangelist who went into the city of Samaria and brought the whole city into the Kingdom. That's an awesome thing, yet he started out waiting on tables and serving in the church in Jerusalem.

The church was made up of Christians—people who had given their lives to Jesus. They were part of what the Scriptures call the church. There are local churches in your area, and believe me, you're going to experience greater growth if you'll find a church, commit to it, submit to the teaching of the pastor, and give yourself to the doctrine and teachings of the apostles and the pastors God has given us as gifts. Get involved, begin to serve, extend yourself, and pour yourself out. Also, in a local church you are able to be involved in fellowship. All of these factors enable us to grow in our relationship with God. If you haven't found a church, I encourage you to pray and ask the Lord to direct you to one. Visit a few to see if there's a connection there. When you go, see how your spirit and heart respond to the vision of the church, the teachings of the pastor, and the people in the congregation.

God has a place for you to serve, a place for you to be ministered to. If you've been burned by a local church, please resist the temptation to withdraw, disconnect, and distance yourself from the body. Take a risk and have enough trust in Jesus to trust again. Begin to develop relationships and I really believe you'll experience the blessing, power, and life of God. It'll be the best thing for you and your family, so I want to encourage you to do it. I believe because it's biblical you'll see the life and power of God demonstrated in your life as you understand the value and importance of a local church. God bless you.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRIST'S CHURCH (Outline)

In God's heart there is one church. If we have received Jesus as our personal Savior, then we belong to the church or body of Christ, as a whole, universally.

There are local expressions of the universal church today. In the New Testament, most of Paul's letters were addressed to a church in a specific city.

Ephesians 4:10-12, "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. ¹¹And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ¹²For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

There are five offices, or functions, filled within the body of Christ. God designed these offices to function within the local church setting. The purpose of these offices, or gifts from Jesus, is that through these gifts, the expression of His life will bring us into a place of ministry and cause us to be empowered to effectively serve Him and be effective.

Acts 2:42, "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

Being a part of a local church includes participating in the following ways:

1. Giving of yourself to the teaching that comes from God's ministry gifts.
2. Fellowshiping with other Christians.
3. Breaking bread together.
4. Praying together.
5. Learning how to commit to each other beyond a place of convenience—submitting to, serving, and loving one another.
6. Becoming involved in a common goal or vision of a particular church and serving in that area.

You will experience greater growth as a Christian if you commit yourself to a local body of believers and begin to serve there.

Pray and ask the Lord to direct you to a local church. Visit and see if there's a connection. See how your spirit and heart respond to that church, to its vision, to the teachings of the pastor, and to the people in the congregation. God has a place for you to serve and a place for you to receive ministry.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRIST'S CHURCH (Teacher's Guide)

1. How does Ephesians 1:22-23 describe the universal church?
As the Body of Christ.
2. How does 1 Corinthians 1:2 describe the local church that was at Corinth?
As the Church of God—sanctified (set apart) and called (invited) to be Saints.
3. According to Ephesians 4:11-12, what is the real job of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher?
To perfect the Saints that they might do the work of the ministry (or works of service).
4. What was the early church like, according to Acts 2:44-47?
They were together, they shared with each other, they worshipped together regularly—met in homes, had communion, shared meals, and praised God.
5. What advice do we glean from Hebrews 10:24-25?
Spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Don't forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and be sure to exhort (encourage) one another.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRIST'S CHURCH (Detailed Teacher's Guide)

Note: The following information may be read out loud (a numbered section at a time) with the person(s) being discipled. After each numbered section is read, pause and ask the question(s) that correspond to the paragraph(s), and then discuss them.

¹Today I want to talk to you about another aspect that's very important in being a disciple and making disciples. Discipleship is the purpose of the local church in our lives. In the scriptures, there is not any specific verse or even a commandment that necessarily talks about the local church, as we know it today. Now let me explain what I mean by that so that you don't think that I am teaching heresy. Today is the age of the local church. In the Scriptures, most of Paul's letters start off by saying, "to the saints" or "to the brethren" in a specific city. There are a lot of reasons for starting scriptures in this particular way. Of course, back then, there was only one church for one city and culturally there were a lot of differences from today's church. God's heart has never changed. There is one church. Anyone who has received Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior—who has been born again and filled with Spirit of God—has become a part of the church (Body of Christ).

²There are also local expressions of the universal or corporate church in the earth today. In any particular city there are hundreds of churches. Many of these churches are life-giving, powerful, Jesus-exalting, healthy churches. However, there are many different pastors, who have different congregations and flocks of individuals.

³Understanding the local church in our lives is very important. Ephesians 4:10 says, "He who descended is also the One (and the "One" is capitalized, referring to Jesus) who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things" (NKJV). Verse 11 and 12 say, "And He himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Basically, these scriptures are mentioning what we refer to as the five offices or five functions that are filled within the body of Christ. The purpose of the five offices is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, so the entire body is edified. Equipping saints through tapes, television, and videos are examples that can be used within our local church setting. Taking advantage of and understanding the gifts is important, because according to scriptures, the five offices are gifts to the body of Christ (the church). Through these gifts, Jesus desires to see the expression of His life, that will bring us to a place of ministry and cause us to be empowered to serve Him effectively.

¹How does Ephesians 1:22-23 describe the universal church?

²How does 1 Corinthians 1:2 describe the local church that was at Corinth?

³According to Ephesians 4:11-12, what is the real job of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher?

⁴Being involved in a local church encompasses much. We are taking advantage of the gifts by giving ourselves to this teaching. Acts 2:42 says, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and prayers.” These are principles of a powerful and effective church. By emphasizing “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine,” the disciples placed a high value on the gift of the apostle and gave themselves over to that gift by gathering with brothers and sisters to listen to the teaching. Discipling includes giving ourselves over to doctrine and teaching that comes from the gifts God has given us. “Fellowship” is also mentioned in this verse, and means to relate to and befriend one another. Lastly, “in breaking of bread and prayers” is a tremendous way for the church to move in power.

⁵Learning how to live within a community in love and serving one another should be exemplified in the local church. Through the good times and the bad times, we need to love each other and be there to encourage one another. Relating positively to one another by being part of a local church, we grow together and function as a body. We are in an atmosphere where we can learn how to commit to each other beyond a place of convenience. Furthermore, being involved in a local church allows us to take advantage of all the giftings of the five offices (apostle, pastor, prophet, evangelist, and teacher) that God freely gave to us.

⁴What was the early church like, according to Acts 2:44-47?

⁵What advice do we glean from Hebrews 10:24-25?

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRIST'S CHURCH
(Discipleship Questions)

Read Ephesians 1:22-23

1. What did God put under Jesus' feet?
2. What did God make Jesus head over?
3. What is He calling His body?
4. Is the Church the fullness of Christ?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:2, 10

5. What two things describe the church of Corinth in this verse?

A. _____
B. _____

6. What two things did Paul plead with the church?

A. _____
B. _____

7. What two things did Paul encourage the church to do?

A. _____
B. _____

Read Ephesians 4:11-12

8. What are the five offices mentioned in verse 11?

A. _____
B. _____
C. _____
D. _____
E. _____

9. What was the purpose for Christ giving these gifts to the church?

A. _____
B. _____
C. _____

Read Acts 2:44-47

10. "Now all who _____ were _____, and had _____ things in _____."
11. Why did they sell all their goods?
12. How did they continue in the temple daily?
13. What did they do from house to house?
14. With what attitude did they eat their food?
15. In verse 47, how did the people respond toward God?
16. What did the Lord do for the people?

Read Hebrews 10:24-25

17. In what way are we to consider one another?
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
18. What must we not forsake?
19. What else must we do as we see the Day approaching?

Read Psalm 84:4

20. Dwelling in God's house, people will still be _____?

Read Isaiah 38:20

21. Where is it that we are to sing songs and play instruments unto the Lord?
22. Why are we so filled with joy that would prompt us to do this?

Read Micah 4:2

23. What will we learn in the House of God?

Read Psalm 84:10

24. What is one day better than in the house of God?
25. What did David say he would rather be?

Read Matthew 21:13

26. What does Jesus call His Father's house?
27. What had the people made His house instead?

Read Mark 11:17

28. Who was this house of prayer available to?

Read John 2:16

29. What did Jesus say that the people had made His Father's house into?
30. In conclusion, what is the purpose for God's house?

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRIST'S CHURCH
(Discipleship Answer Key)

1. All things
2. All things to the church
3. Church
4. Yes
5. A. Sanctified in Christ
B. called to be saints
6. A. Speak the same thing
B. Have no divisions
7. A. Be perfectly joined in the same mind
B. And judgment
8. A. Apostles
B. Prophets
C. Evangelists
D. Pastors
E. Teachers
9. A. For equipping the saints
B. For the work of the ministry
C. For the edifying of the Body of Christ
10. Believed – together – all – common
11. To provide for the needs of the body
12. With one accord
13. Break bread
14. With gladness and simplicity of heart
15. Praise
16. Added to His church daily
17. A. In love
B. In good works
18. Assembling ourselves together
19. Exhort one another
20. Praising God
21. In the house of the Lord
22. The Lord saved me
23. His ways
24. A thousand elsewhere
25. A doorkeeper
26. A house of prayer
27. A den of thieves
28. All nations
29. A house of merchandise
30. Praise, worship, teaching, encouragement

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRIST'S CHURCH (Additional Information)

The word "Church" is:

- a. Derived probably from the Greek word "kuriakon," meaning "the Lord's house," that was used by ancient authors to describe the place of worship. In the New Testament it is the translation of the Greek word "ecclesia," which is synonymous with the Hebrew word "kahal" of the Old Testament—both words simply mean "an assembly." The precise meaning can only be known from the connection in which the word is found. There is no clear instance of this word being used for a place of meeting or worship, although in post-apostolic times, it clearly received this meaning. Nor is this word ever used to denote the inhabitants of a country united in the same profession, as when we say, "the Church of England," "the Church of Scotland," etc. We find the word "ecclesia" used in the following senses in the New Testament:
 1. It is translated "assembly" in the ordinary classical sense (Acts 19:32, 39, 41).
 2. It denotes the whole body of the redeemed, all those whom the Father has given to Christ, the invisible, universal church (Ephesians 5:23, 25, 27, 28, and Hebrews 12:23).
 3. A few Christians associated together in observing the ordinances of the gospel are an ecclesia (Romans 16:5, and Colossians 4:15).
 4. All the Christians in a particular city, whether they assemble together in one place or in several places for religious worship, are an ecclesia. Thus all the disciples in Antioch, forming several congregations, were one church (Acts 13:1). We read of "the Church of God at Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1:2), "the Church at Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1), and "the Church of Ephesus" (Revelations 2:1).
 5. The whole body of professing Christians throughout the world (1 Corinthians 15:9, Galatians 1:13, and Matthew 16:18), are the church of Christ. The visible church consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children. It is called "visible" because its members are known and its assemblies are public. Here there is a mixture of wheat and chaff, of saints and sinners. God has commanded his people to organize themselves into distinct visible ecclesiastical communities, with constitutions, laws, officers, badges, ordinances, and discipline, for the great purpose of giving visibility to His kingdom, of making known the gospel of that kingdom, and of gathering in all its elect subjects.

Each one of these distinct organized communities, which is faithful to the great King is an integral part of the visible church, and all together constitute the universal visible church. A credible profession of Christ constitutes a person—a member of this church. This is “the kingdom of heaven,” whose character and progress are set forth in the parables recorded in Matthew 13:1.

The church invisible “consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ, the head thereof.” This is a pure society, the church in which Christ dwells. It is the body of Christ. It is called “invisible” because the greater part of those who constitute it are already in heaven or are yet unborn, and also because its members still on earth cannot certainly be distinguished.

The qualifications of membership in it are internal and are hidden. It is unseen except by Him who “searches the heart.” “The Lord knoweth them that are his” (2 Timothy 2:19). The church, to which the attributes, prerogatives, and promises appertaining to Christ’s kingdom belong, is a spiritual body consisting of all true believers, i.e., the church invisible.

1. ITS UNITY: God has never had only one church on earth. We sometimes speak of the Old Testament church and of the New Testament church—the church was not to be changed but enlarged (Isaiah 49:13-23, 60:1-14). When the Jews are at length restored, they will not enter a new church, but will be grafted again into “their own olive tree” (Romans 11:18-24, and Ephesians 2:11-22). The apostles did not set up a new organization. Under their ministry disciples were added to the already existing church (Acts 2:47).
2. ITS UNIVERSALITY: It is not confined to any particular country or outward organization, but comprehends all believers throughout the whole world.
3. ITS PERPETUITY: It will continue through all ages to the end of the world. It can never be destroyed. It is an “everlasting kingdom.”

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Discipleship Evangelism
P.O. Box 17007
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80935-7007 U.S.A.
www.krowtracts.com www.delessons.org
Phone: 719-577-7775