

Choosing A Local Church

“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 10:24–25).

I. The Universal Church

A. The body of Christ and more

The universal “Church” is composed of all the saved of all the world. It differs from the local church primarily in scope and government. The universal Church answers to Jesus Christ through the Holy Ghost.

Hebrews 12:22–23; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

The relationship of Jesus Christ to the Church is described through a number of symbols in the New Testament:

1. The Head and the body

*Romans 12:4–5; 1 Corinthians 6:15; 12:12–13, 27;
Ephesians 4:4; 5:30; Colossians 1:18*

2. The Bridegroom and the bride

2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22–32; Revelation 21:9

3. The Vine and the branches

John 15:1–5

4. The Shepherd and the sheep

John 10:11; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4

5. The High Priest and the kingdom of priests

*Hebrews 2:9, 17; 3:1; 4:14–16; 5:9–10; 1 Peter 2:9;
Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6*

6. The Cornerstone and the living stones

Ephesians 2:19–22; Hebrews 2:3–8; 1 Peter 2:4–5

B. The mystery of God

The present age, which is called the “Church Age,” or the “Age of Grace,” or the “Age of Faith,” was initiated only after Israel had rejected her Messiah, Jesus Christ. It was never revealed fully to the prophets, or even to the angels, that the church age was part of God’s great redemptive plan. In fact, if the Jews had accepted Jesus as their Messiah, it would never have occurred as we know it (*see Romans 16:25–26, and Ephesians 3:1–5*).

The Church Age was kept a secret for two reasons. The first reason was to guarantee the Jews a full opportunity to accept Messiah and usher in an earthly kingdom in which Israel would become a nation of priests and Christ would rule the world from an earthly throne. If the Jews had known the alternative, they would have had reasons to accept Messiah other than through obedience and love for God (*see Romans 11:25*). They would have known the alternative was ascendancy for the Gentiles. On the other hand, if they still rejected their Messiah, they would have the excuse that it was already prophesied and thus unavoidable. In such case they would be exonerated from all guilt.

The second reason the Church Age was never revealed was that Satan would never have arranged to have Jesus die on the cross if he had realized that it was the key part of the redemptive process. Therefore the Church Age was never revealed until after Christ had risen from the dead and ascended to the Father. The apostles were given the task of introducing the Church to the world. They were given special powers to heal, speak in foreign languages, and so on in order to accomplish their task (*see Ephesians 3:6–11 and 1 Corinthians 2:6–9*).

Colossians 1:24–27; 2:1–2; 4:2; 1 Corinthians 4:1; 15:51–54; Ephesians 1:3–14; 6:18–20; 1 Timothy 3:16; Revelation 10:7

II. The Local Church

- A. **What is a local church? A local church is a body of saved people which serves the Lord in a specific area.**

2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1–2; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1–2

B. What is the mission of a local church? The local church actually has a three primary missions.

1. The salvation of sinners

Acts 2:46–47

2. The edification of the saints

1 Timothy 1:1–4; 1 Corinthians 1:4–5

When you were saved, you became one of the saints of God

1 Corinthians 1:1–2; Romans 1:7; 14:19;

1 Thessalonians 5:11

3. The glorification of God through the Lord Jesus Christ

Romans 15:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:11–12; Romans 16:27;

Philippians 4:20

C. How is the local church governed?

“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1).

1. Bishops (or Elders) now called Pastors, Ministers, etc. These men are given authority over the individual members of the congregation in all spiritual matters.

1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9

2. Deacons or lay-leaders These men are to lead the congregation by example and to assist the pastors.

1 Timothy 3:8–13

D. Why should I be involved in a local church? Besides being a commandment of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:25), being a member of a local church provides many benefits to the sincere Christian. A few of these are:

1. Encouragement in the faith

Ephesians 3:19–21

2. Christian fellowship, family, and community

Acts 2:41; 1 John 1:7; Hebrews 12:22–23

3. Exhortation to grow strong in the faith

1 Peter 2:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Peter 3:18

4. A place to minister

1 Corinthians 15:58; Ephesians 4:11–12; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 1:17

5. A place to worship God

Psalms 45:11; Psalms 96:9; Matthew 4:10

III. What Are the Critical Criteria for Choosing the Right Church?

Choosing the right church is not a matter to be taken lightly. You need to know where the church stands on the important issues of the faith. Many modern churches have strayed far from biblical truths for a variety of reasons. You cannot grow properly in a church that has abandoned some of the principles of the faith. You need to pray for wisdom before making a final choice on a church (James 1:5). The following is a list of the fundamental beliefs that are absolutely necessary for a church to be true to the biblical precepts given for the Church. Two of these issues have been dealt with in detail in previous lessons and the rest will be dealt with in detail in subsequent lessons. Therefore no scriptural references will be provided at this time with these statements. Any prospective church should willingly provide you with a copy of their doctrinal positions that you may compare with the list below.

“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Timothy 4:16).

Doctrinal positions a proper church *must* subscribe to:

- A. The Bible is the inerrant, infallible, divinely inspired and preserved Word of God and is the final authority on all matters of faith or areas of life to which it speaks.**
- B. There is one God, eternally existent in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.**
- C. Jesus Christ was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of a virgin, became God manifest in the flesh, lived a sinless life on earth, died on the cross to make an eternally all-sufficient atonement for all sin, rose bodily from death and the grave, ascended to sit at the Father's right hand, and will one day soon return in personal, bodily form to this Earth as King of kings to reign for 1000 years.**
- D. Man is born in moral depravity with a sin nature and must be justified and regenerated or born again to have eternal life. Further, that justification is a judicial act of God on the believer's behalf based solely on the merits of Jesus Christ and that the believer is regenerated and sealed by the power of the Holy Ghost and thus secure in Christ until the day of redemption.**
- E. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church which is the God ordained organization of the body of all true believers. Further, that the Church is called to observe the ordinances of Christian baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper for believers.**
- F. Final judgment by God is assured for all men resulting in the everlasting blessedness of the redeemed in heaven and the everlasting doom of the unregenerate in the lake of fire with the devil and his angels.**

IV. What Are Some Other Criteria for Choosing a Local Church?

A. A church actively involved in ministry to the local community

Luke 10:27; Galatians 5:13–14; Romans 15:1–3

B. A church deeply involved in missions

Acts 13:1–3; Matthew 28:19–20

C. A church that regularly attempts to win others to Christ

Acts 2:47

D. A church that believes and carefully teaches the Bible as the Word of God and the infallible guide for life

Acts 17:10–12; 1 Timothy 3:15–16; 2 Timothy 2:15

V. What Is My Obligation to My Church?

Your obligations to your new church will change over time. You must take time to truly understand what the church stands for. You must also allow time to “prove” yourself to your new church.

A. Obligation to learn and grow as a Christian

“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:5–6).

1. Learn by listening. Attend as many services as possible to enhance your development as a Christian.

Matthew 7:24; Romans 10:17

2. Learn by giving. The bulk of your tithes and offerings should go to your local church.

Luke 6:38; 1 Corinthians 16:1–2

B. Obligation to participate in ministry

As you begin to mature as a Christian, you should look for ministry opportunities. Ask the Lord to guide you into the right ministry

Matthew 4:19; James 1:22–25

C. Obligation to lead

As you continue to mature as a Christian, you should be willing to accept leadership positions in the church's ministries. Alternatively, you may consider starting a new ministry that is lacking in your church

2 Timothy 2:2

VI. Some Important Additional Considerations

- A. You will be in spiritual subjection to the pastor and his staff. You must consider whether these are the kind of men you can submit to.**

Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 5:1–2; 5–6

- B. Are women given positions of authority over men? Women are not to be pastors or in positions of leadership over men.**

1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 11:2–3; 14:34–35

- C. Can you fit with the congregation comfortably?**

1 Corinthians 1:10; 11:17–22; Philippians 1:27; Colossians 2:1–2

D. Are “gifts of the Spirit” or “signs and wonders” used carelessly or blasphemously?

1 Corinthians 14:27–28; Mark 3:28–29

Over the last 100 years or so, a movement has grown within the church to produce the same signs and wonders that the apostles showed in the early church. This movement has brought much confusion and ungodliness into the church. The people that practice these “miracles” are often very shallow in doctrine and scriptural knowledge, preferring a religion driven by emotion over one driven by knowledge.

Much damage has been done to the cause of Christ when so-called healers perform fake healings, sometimes for exorbitant prices (2 Peter 2:1–3). There is much to suggest that many other gifts of the Spirit are being faked as well. This is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost! If what is going on in the church seems “weird” to you, it may be the Holy Ghost is showing you that church is not for you.

We recommend that you avoid churches where unusual forms of worship are experienced or where people speak in a language you do not understand without an interpreter (1 Corinthians 14:27–28).

VII.A Biblical Exhortation

The Church is a God-ordained organism of which all born again, blood-washed Christians are automatically a part. However, not all Christians take their part seriously. From the verses quoted at the beginning of this lesson, you can see that God expects His people to assemble themselves together to encourage and assist each other to grow in love and good works. This type of assembly, when done in a proper, organized fashion, produces what we call a local church.

According to Hebrews 10:25, our Lord considers this type of assembly to be even more important as we see a certain ‘day’ approaching. This “day,” which incorporates the final 1000 years of this present Earth’s history is almost here. We will go into this in greater detail in a future lesson, but for now we will summarize briefly what this day is all about.

The day mentioned in the above verse is alluded to throughout the entire Bible. It is called by several names, but most frequently it is referred to as the “day of the Lord.” The day of the Lord begins with a “rapture” event. A rapture is a bodily removal of the saints of God (that’s you and I) without the intervention of death (see 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). At this time, these people will receive a glorified body that cannot get sick, feel pain, be injured, or have needs. They will truly have everlasting life. The rapture of the Church will be immediately preceded by the resurrection of the righteous dead whose souls have been in a part of heaven called Paradise. The resurrected bodies will be glorified in the same manner as the living and the souls of these dead will be reunited with their bodies (see Philippians 3:20–21; 1 John 3:2–3; 1 Corinthians 15:35–38).

Immediately following the initial rapture, will be a 7 year period known as the “tribulation.” It will be characterized by devastating natural disasters, plagues, wars, and many other severe judgments from a furious God which will claim billions of lives. These judgments will result from an open rebellion and rejection of God in favor of a man the Bible calls the “man of sin” or “Antichrist.”

The tribulation will end with a final war, called the “battle of Armageddon” in which millions of people from all nations will assemble to attack and destroy Israel. At this moment, Jesus Christ will return in bodily form and rescue the Jews from extinction. He will slaughter every one of Israel’s enemies and set up an earthly throne from which He will reign for 1000 years. Many of those in His church will also return and reign with Him. This 1000 year period, known as the “millennium” will be a time of peace and righteousness because punishment for sin will be swift, harsh, and sure. The millennium will end with a final rebellion against God in which the last of the enemies of God will be killed. After that there will be a final resurrection and judgment and then this entire present universe will be destroyed by fire. God will then create a new heaven and a new Earth, untouched by sin, where we will live forever more. This day of the Lord is now fast approaching. We believe that, unless you are terminally ill, there is a very good likelihood that it will arrive within your lifetime—no matter how old you are! So get involved in a local church. Get involved in working for the Lord. The time is very short. There are so many unsaved people. The work is very great.

*“Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame”
(1 Corinthians 15:34).*

