

Blessings Through the Local Church

What The Local Church Ought To Mean To You!

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Introduction:

There are two organizations that are God's institutions -- the home and the church. Both of these ought to be esteemed highly by the Christian.

God makes much of the church in this age of grace and it is the Church God ordained to fulfill His work throughout the world. It is His institution to carry out His plan and will on the earth during this dispensation. God planned for the Church as His principle institution to reach the world with the Gospel.

Consider the many verses about the Church: (Acts 2:36-47; 5:11; 8:1; 9:31; 11:26; 13:1-4; 14:23,27; 15:3, 22, 41; 16:5; Romans 16:5; I Corinthians 4:17; 14:4, 5, 23; Ephesians 1:22; 3:10; 5:24, 25, 27, 29, 32; Colossians 1:18, 24 It would be wise to read these and think them through.)

Just as God has a purpose, design and plan for Israel in the past, present, and future, so He has a purpose, design and plan for the Church in the past, present and future. We should make much of the local Church and understand its importance in regard to our walk with the Lord. Nothing, but nothing can substitute for the local church and its ministry.

Questions... for discussion:

1. How important is your home to you? How important is your home to the members of your household?
 2. How does your home and family minister to you?
 3. And how do you think God looks at the local church and its ministry? If the home is important, then the church is just as important, as far as God is concerned. If you think that is true, why would you concur?
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I. GOD DESIRES TO USE THE CHURCH TO DEEPEN YOUR FELLOWSHIP.

(See Acts 2:41, 42; 4:23; 11:23; 12:5; I Corinthians 1:9; I John 1:3, 4. All of these Scriptures refer to the local church and emphasizes its importance.

1. Impact of the Early Church.

In the early church, the first church in Jerusalem, the believers continued steadfastly in fellowship, doctrine, prayer and breaking of bread. If you had been in Jerusalem in that day and had come to Christ, the blessing of these things could not have been yours if you were an absentee. Your presence with the rest of the saved would have been very important to you and your family.

Do we not have great loss today when we are not present with the company of the saved when they meet for fellowship, teaching (doctrine), praying, and the Lord's Supper or the breaking of bread?

2. Impact of Thomas's Absence.

In John 20:24-29, we read of Thomas's absence when Christ was with the disciples on resurrection morning. They told Thomas about Christ's resurrection but he would not believe it. He determined he must see and feel the wounds if he were to accept this as a fact. His absence brought great loss to him. What if Christ had not willed to particularly manifest Himself to Thomas? Can we presume to absent ourselves from the services and not have loss?

3. Impact of Fellowship.

The theme of I John 1:1-2:3 is fellowship. Perhaps you ought to read and study this portion and then note the emphasis on fellowship. Why was this epistle written?

II. GOD DESIRES TO USE THE CHURCH TO GUARD YOUR LIFE AGAINST BACKSLIDING OR GOING ASTRAY.

The hymn writer wrote the words, "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." It is easy for any Christian to wander (to go astray) and become cold of heart. We can so easily become like the embers in a fireplace which are placed away from the main part of the fire and quickly become cold.

Note in the following verses the use of the word, backslide, or other words which indicate our slipping away from the Lord: (Prov. 14:14; Jere. 2:19, 21; 14:7; Heb. 10:19-25) Often such backsliding is due to neglect of the house of God, the local church, as well as neglect of the Scriptures and a prayer life. We are commanded to not neglect the house of God. (Heb. 10:25)

III. GOD DESIRES TO USE THE CHURCH TO ENLARGE OUR SERVICE.

What would we know about Paul, Peter, or others of the Apostles or disciples if they had not labored in or with the early church and in the work of planting churches? If they had been freelance believers and ministers, ignoring the work and place of the local churches, we would not read of their labors. Our labors or service can be enlarged also, IF we are willing to be faithful to the local church.

1. Unity of Purpose and Burden Is Seen in Acts 4:23-33.

We read here about the early churches' reaction to the persecution which they faced together. These men returned to their own company, and with one accord they began to pray and seek God. They desired God's hand and power upon them. They were all involved, all concerned, and all moved in heart concerning the need. It says they were all of one accord. What a blessing!

2. Missionary Outreach Is Seen in Acts 13:1-5.

Those who fasted and ministered as unto the Lord were also led of the Holy Spirit to send forth Saul (Paul) and Barnabas. These two men would not have been sent if they have been negligent toward the local church. And the men who sent them would not have had a part in the harvest, if they had been indifferent to that local church.

3. Caring Ministry Is Seen in Acts 11:19-26.

Many were being saved in the ancient northern city of Antioch and the leaders of

the church in Jerusalem were concerned about the welfare of these new converts. They sent Barnabas to minister to them. He would not have been sent to spearhead this marvelous ministry among those newly saved if he had been indifferent to the local church. And then he sent to Tarsus for Saul to come labor with him.

Note: God planned for the local church to be a place of growth, training, service, worship, and evangelism. This may be an oversimplification, but God wants to use our lives in many powerful ways. Those who have little respect for the church and little idea of the purpose and importance of the church also render little service and therefore receive little blessing.

IV. GOD DESIRES TO USE THE CHURCH TO STRENGTHEN YOUR TESTIMONY.

The testimonies of Paul, Titus, Timothy, Barnabas, Peter, etc., demonstrated their concern for the local churches, where their labors and service was focused. (Read Acts 15:35, 36, 41, 20: 17-21, 26, 27.) Paul spoke of the manner of life and service he had among the saved in Ephesus. Paul did not have a divided heart about the importance of the church. His labor was consistent.

V. GOD DESIRES TO USE THE CHURCH TO DEEPEN YOUR PRAYER LIFE.

(See Acts 1:14; 2:1-4, 42; 3:1; 4:23-33; 6:4). No doubt the early saints had fellowship, but I think there was more emphasis on the upper room than on the supper room. They were more attuned to the need of God's power than to their own desires for food and fellowship. It is much easier today to have a crowd at the supper room than it is to get a crowd who are desirous to spend much time in prayer.

The Christians in the early church were a praying people. Details of prayer meetings are recorded in a number of the early chapters of the Book of Acts. These people knew how to pray and prayer was very important to them. They were probably among those that asked Christ to teach them how to pray. (Luke 11; 18)

In my early Christian life and experience prayer meetings in my home church or with the saints in different situations had a great impact on my life.

VI. GOD DESIRES TO USE THE CHURCH TO FULFILL HIS WILL.

God's will in our lives is of paramount importance. We read much in the Gospel of John in chapters 5, 6, and 8 about Christ and the will of God.

1. To Bring Glory to God. (Ephesians 2:20, 21; 1:6, 1:12)

One of the principal purposes of the church is to be "*to the praise of His glory.*" He wills that in action, word, deed, and life, collectively and individually, we would bring glory to God. The great desire of the local church should be to bring glory to God by doing His will.

2. To be a habitation of God through the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

The church universal (as named by some), formed during the age of grace will finally meet in glory some day. This large group, called out of every tongue and tribe and nation, and the local church are a habitation of God through the Spirit. The local church is the visible body of the saved of all the ages in various cultures, places, and times. To the extent the Holy Spirit controls the vessels of the saints and we walk in clean before the Lord, yielded, and surrendered can be truly be His habitation in every

sense of the word. Of course, He does dwell in the saved individual and this indwelling is not based on the perfection of the saint. (I Cor. 3:15-18; I Cor. 6:19, 20)

3. To develop its members spiritually (Ephesians 4:11,12)

According to the Word of God, Paul's desire was in line with the will of God. As you read Acts 20:28-31, you will note that Paul was burdened about the growth and maturity of the Ephesians believers.

4. To bear witness to the truth. (I Timothy 3:15-17)

We noted this before, but consider that as we witness, evangelize, and labor in outreach the church is to be and becomes the pillar or support of the truth and the ground or foundation of the truth. We are to contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints. (Consider the book of Jude.)

Application Questions:

1. As you read I John 1:1-6, consider why you think fellowship is so important.? What does God desire to produce through our fellowship? What happens when we are not in the fellowship of God's people on a regular, consistent basis?
2. Why do Christians drift, become cold and apathetic? How can we guard against sin?
3. How do you relate to the local church? How important is the church as evidenced by your decisions, time management, and priorities? Why should it be important?