Olive Drive Church

Lesson 70: Wednesday February 8, 2017

**HANDOUT**

**Q108. What is the *local church*?**

The local church is a group of professing believers who have covenanted to unify together to worship and glorify God by fulfilling the commands and mission God has given to the body of Christ.

**Q109. What are the primary duties of the local church?**

The local church is to submit to the authority of the Bible, follow the leadership of qualified elders, regularly gather together, serve one another, practice higher levels of accountability, and live missional lives together.

Ecclesiology - study of the church

Ecclesia (translated to the word church) - God’s called out people, a gathering of God’s people.

The word church in the Bible always refers to people. It is used to refer to the body of Christ in 3 different ways:

1. As the universal church.
2. As the local church, i.e. the church of Ephesus.
3. As the body of living believers.

**Q100. What is the *universal church*?**

The universal church is all the members of the body of Christ, made up of people from all around the world. It is all who are called out of darkness, regenerated, and set apart by God’s saving grace. It is all the genuine believers in Jesus.

**The local church is a group of professing believers**

Another common way that the universal and local church are referred to is by the terms invisible church and visible church.

The universal church is referred to as invisible, not because its members are invisible or because there is no visible evidence of its existence, but because of the invisible work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating the hearts of all its members. We are not with 100% accuracy able to tell who is truly saved because we cannot see what is in a person’s heart the same way God does.

The local church is referred to as the visible church because it is made up of members who show outward/visible evidence of salvation…they are professing believers. They have made a credible confession of faith in Christ, obeyed the command to be baptized, and show no sign of ongoing unrepentant sin in their lives, hence, it is a credible confession.

We do not accept that the local church is *designed* to be made up of hypocrites along with authentic believers, but we acknowledge that it is unavoidable due to our limitations. This is not acceptable but it is a reality.

Matthew 7:21-23 21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name? ' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

1 John 2:19-20: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

Someone who was once part of the local church and then turns and walks away from it proves that they were never really part of the church. They may have been a part of it in a visible way, through their words and attendance, and maybe even their mighty works or good deeds, but they were not part of it in the invisible realm of their heart.

*The local church is a group of professing believers* ***who have covenanted to unify together***

Covenant Membership:

1. **UNITY:** Covenant Membership provides every member with a clear understanding of the

mission, vision and core beliefs of that local church body by which they can unify around and commit to carry out.

2**. COMMITMENT:**Covenant Membership allows every member to make a commitment to each other that they

will fulfill the priorities and expectations according to an agreed upon written covenant.

3. **ACCOUNTABILITY:**Covenant Membership gives every member a formal avenue by which they can invite

that local church body and leadership to hold them accountable to what God has ordained for his children as they walk daily in Christ.

4. **DEPENDABILITY:**Covenant Membership solidifies who within the local church body can be counted on as

a dependable member who will use their time, giftedness, and finances to help that local church body fulfill

their God given mission, vision and beliefs.

Acts 2:42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles ' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

**1 Timothy 4:13** Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

**Hebrews 10:24-25** And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

**1 Corinthians 12:21-26** The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

**Ephesians 4:2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love

John 13:35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

When we covenant with one another through membership, it lets us know the depth of our commitment and our willingness to be held accountable to that commitment. It also provides a way for us to clarify what that commitment involves so we are not all operating on a different interpretation of what we’re committing to.

Every local church is meant to be a picture of the true unity that we have as brothers and sisters in Christ.

When God tells us to be of one mind, to bear with one another, to agree, to forgive, to think more highly of others than we do of ourselves, to serve one another, to submit to our elders, to honor one another…it is not for us to gain unity, but to maintain unity. We are already united in Christ.

 **Ephesians 4:1-3** I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We have been called to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This is meant to be done in a local context where it can be seen in action by others. It is not a union we are a part of like a club we belong to. It is a unity that is especially seen in our diversity. It is a unity that displays the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It shows that we are not united by our common preferences or personalities, but by the one Spirit who has made us part of God’s family.

The local church is a group of professing believers who have covenanted to unify together ***to worship and glorify God.***

When we gather together as the local church, the primary purpose is corporate worship. Worship is our highest call. To glorify God… all is ultimately for this. This is what our mission statement says…We (Disciples Church) exist to glorify God through lives transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As the local church, we are gathered together to exalt God and worship Him with songs, fellowship, the sacraments, and the teaching of the Word. It is important for us to understand that the focus of our corporate time together is not reaching unbelievers. Too many Christians are of the mindset that we need to bring people to the corporate worship services when the saints are gathered together so they can be evangelized. Don’t get me wrong, invite your unbelieving friends to join us for worship and let us pray that they will hear and see the beauty of the gospel on display in the way we worship together.

But we must be very careful not to fall into the trap of thinking that we should strategize our corporate gathering to be geared towards unbelievers. It must be geared toward the worship of God!

The local church is a group of professing believers, not unbelievers, so we should not be designing our time together for unbelievers. When churches become dominated by the influence of unbelievers, they eventually cease to be churches.

The local church is a group of professing believers who have covenanted to unify together to worship and glorifyGod ***by fulfilling the commands and mission God has given to the body of Christ.***

**1 Samuel 15:22-23a** "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,

as in obeying the voice of the Lord?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,

and to listen than the fat of rams.

23 For rebellion is as the sin of divination,

and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.

God’s word has given us clear instruction on how we are to worship Him.

**Q109. What are the primary duties of the local church?**

The local church is to submit to the authority of the Bible, follow the leadership of qualified elders, regularly gather together, serve one another, practice higher levels of accountability, and live missional lives together.

1. The local church is to submit to the authority of the Bible.

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

1. Follow the leadership of qualified elders.

**Hebrews 13:17** Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

**Ephesians 4:11-12** And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers [elders], 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

The elders have been appointed by God to lead, feed, protect, and care for the flock. A Christian who is not part of a local church is not only missing out on the benefits of being led by God’s appointed leaders, but they are also in direct violation of His command to submit to them. It is impossible for a person to obey the command to submit to the elders if they are not part of a LOCAL church.

Elders are specifically appointed to serve in local congregations.

**Titus 1:5** This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—

A church without biblically qualified elders is not a true church.

Is there a point where it would be ok for us to not follow the leadership of our qualified elders? The answer is no and the key to that answer is the term qualified. God has given very clear instruction in His word on how we are to qualify those who are to lead the church. This is not a one and done qualification. It is an ongoing qualification. As long as our elders are qualified, we are to honor and submit to their leadership.

We must also remember that our elders are sinners saved by grace just like the rest of us. We cannot put them on a pedestal that expects an impossible level of perfection. Pray for your elders. If Satan is able to destroy the shepherds of the local church, it will be much easier to get to the flock under their care.

We want to be able to look at our elders and feel confident in following them, not because they can be trusted based on their perfection, but because God has appointed them as our leaders and He can be trusted. Our submission to our elders is ultimately a submission to God.

1. Regularly gather together.

We showed the need for us in the local church to regularly gather when we looked at Scripture’s command for us to be unified. We cannot fulfill God’s command for us to be making disciples and to be serving as a vital part of the body if we are not showing up. We have explicit commands all over Scripture that are predicated on our meeting together regularly.

**Hebrews 3:13** But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

This is one of many “one anothers” found in Scripture. How do we exhort one another every day if we are not meeting regularly? He is making a larger point about the importance of our need for each other when it comes to remaining in the faith. The book of Hebrews is not addressed to any particular church or group of churches, but the author is clearly speaking in a way that assumes his audience is part of a gathering of the local church.

Here are a few more “one another” passages.

**Romans 14:19 (NASB)** So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

**1 Thessalonians 5:11** Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

**Romans 15:7** ...welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

As Christians, we are expected, in fact, it’s assumed that we would be doing life with one another. Our individual testimonies of God’s love for us are given exponential impact when that love is being modeled in the way that we love one another as the body of Christ.

Jesus loves His body. He loves the church. He is committed to the church. He gave Himself for the church. We must not think that we can have a flippant attitude toward the body of Christ and not have it affect our relationship with Christ who is the head.

Scripture commands us to take seriously our commitment of meeting together.

**Hebrews 10:24-25** And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Work, hobbies, fatigue, kids’ activities, etc. can all tempt us to neglect meeting together. Do you see how this is an unacceptable practice for God’s people? We cannot let these things take precedence over the importance of corporate worship.

1. Serve one another.

**Galatians 5:13** For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love *serve one another.*

The local church provides us the opportunity to display the love Christ has for us in the way we love and serve each other. Our service to one another is to flow out of our love for one another.

This kind of serving is meant to be an expression of genuine love and affection for one another. And not just a general group of people, the individuals who make up that group, but each person who makes up the local church we are serving.

**Romans 12:3-6** For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them…

1. Practice higher levels of accountability.

**Colossians 3:16** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

The accountability we are called to is part of our worship, meant to be as much a part of our life together as the singing we do. It is the outflow of the word of Christ in us

Loving admonishment and correction that is grounded in God’s word is the greatest gift we can give each other.

1. Live missional lives together.

Ephesians 4:11-12 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

When we gather for corporate worship, we are being equipped and built up for the work of ministry.

When we are carrying out the first five duties of the local church, we are actually fulfilling a large part of what it means for us to be missional by the purity and holiness of our lives together.

The local church is the physical manifestation of the body of Christ in the world. Even though it is unintentionally comprised of true believers and hypocrites, we are instructed by God’s word to operate and be governed in such a way that we are always striving for holiness and purity. That is the purpose of church discipline - to protect and maintain the purity of the church and it’s testimony.