Olive Drive Church

Lesson 70: Thursday February 9, 2017

**TEACHING NOTES**

**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.

**1 John 1:7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

**1 Peter 1:22** Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God

Tonight we are continuing our study of the church, what is called ecclesiology. That word ecclesiology comes from the Greek word ecclesia which means a gathering of people, or a group of called out people. In the Greek Old Testament, the same word ecclesia is used to describe the congregation of the Israelites. In the New Testament, ecclesia means God’s called out people, or a gathering of God’s people. Our Bibles almost always translate the word ecclesia as church.

When we read the word church in our Bibles, we need to have the definition of ecclesia in mind-God’s called out people. The English dictionary gives many definitions for the word church including place of worship, worship building, worship services, or religious group. Very few dictionaries include the biblical definition of church. Most people, even some within the church, have the secular definition of church in mind when they say church. When people say “I’m going to church” they usually mean “I’m going to the church building or to a worship service.”

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.

Steve started us out several weeks ago by teaching on the Universal church and since then we’ve covered prayer, the mission of the church, and Christian accountability and discipline. Tonight, we turn our attention to the local church and its primary duties as we go over questions 108 and 109. My goal in teaching through these two questions is for you to have a very clear understanding of why the local church is such a vital component of God’s plan for His people.

We’ll start by reading both questions and answers together and then I will unpack them separately, but the questions are intertwined so I will be speaking to aspects of both throughout tonight’s lesson.

**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.

And now we’ll read the next one:

**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.

Now, before we look more closely at our definition of the local church, I want to go back and review our definition of the universal church as a way to highlight the differences.

Let’s read question 100 together:

**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.

So, the universal church is all of the elect, past, present, and future. All of those who are part of the universal church will remain a part of the universal church and will never fall away because they are established and preserved by God.

**In our definition of the local church we read: “The local church is a group of professing believers”.**

Let’s stop there. Here, we have our first major distinction between the universal and the local church.

The universal church is made up of genuine believers while the local church is made up 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.

And yet, even with these outward evidences, it is a sad reality that some within the local church are not inwardly converted and their hearts are still serving idols. This is not acceptable but it is a reality. 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.

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.

Jesus is clearly teaching that there are people who will confess Him as Lord, who even appear to prophesy and cast out demons and do mighty works in His name, and yet they are not His sheep. He says to them “I never knew you.” Now we know that Jesus is omniscient, so when He says I never knew you, He means I never had a loving intimate relationship with you. He is saying that all of their outward acts were ultimately to serve their own interests, not as an expression of genuine love for Him.

We are all sinners saved by grace and our ongoing struggle with sin is real, so we don’t cast judgment on someone’s salvation every time we see them sin. We are called by God to show grace, to love them as He has commanded based on their proclamation. Hopefully, you were here for Matt’s lesson 2 weeks ago on Christian accountability within the church. He showed the Bible’s teaching on how and why we define a person as a part of the church. We may have concerns for someone’s lack of fruit, but until the biblical steps of accountability have led us to treat them as an unbeliever, or until they have turned their back on the faith, we are to graciously and patiently bear with them as brothers in Christ.

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.

There is so much more that could be said about this but we need to move on. So, let’s get back to our answer.

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

Part of what is seen in the profession of this group of believers is a commitment to unity. There is an obedience to the commands given in scripture regarding to how we are to relate to one another.

Here at Disciples Church, we formalize this commitment through our Covenant membership class. Scripture does not prescribe an exact method for how the local church is to keep track of its members, so we are not saying that our method is the only way to obey the command for the church to be committed and united, but we do share the conviction that this type of formal commitment is the best way for us to hold one another to the biblical standard of unity, commitment, accountability, and dependability.

We state it like this in the membership class:

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.

They were devoted. They made being a part of the gathering a priority. They were committed. While this passage is descriptive of the early church and not explicitly *pre*scriptive, it is implicitly prescriptive. It is an account of what the church looks like. We have enough instruction in the rest of scripture to make this point clear.

**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.

This devotion to one another is simply the expression of our love for each other. Our commitment to unify together provides the necessary context for us to practice that love.

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

We don’t love each other because we are all so lovable. We love each other because God has made us a family and now we choose to love one another in the same way Christ has loved us.

It is common today for people to live together and not get married. Basically they are saying to each other, “I love you, but I’m not committed to you or I’m not willing to risk real commitment.”

No one loves their children that way. They don’t have the thought that if it doesn’t work out, I always have an out. It is a love that is committed no matter what.

That is the kind of love and commitment God has called us to. John 13:35 says:

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

Our love and commitment to one another is real and deep. It’s not an “I love you, but don’t want to marry you.” There is a genuine commitment that is not afraid of the necessary implications of that commitment. 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.

We must understand that every local church is meant to be a picture of the true unity that we have as brothers and sisters in Christ. Here in America, we have become way too conditioned by the plethora of choices we have. The freedom to make our own choices is arguably the most treasured value our society holds to. We have choices with the food we eat, the car we drive, the school we go to, the lifestyle we want to live, and now, even the gender we want to be identified as.

This mindset has carried over into our view of the church as well. There is no shortage of choices when it comes to local churches and a person must exercise extreme discernment and wisdom when faced with choosing a local church. Scripture gives us all the direction we need when it comes to evaluating the requirements we should look for in a local church. We think of it as a good thing that there are so many different denominations and different worship styles and different personalities of church leaders to match up with our own individual preferences of belief, style, and taste. People think it’s important to find a place that matches their unique preferences and personality traits. But is that what we see in scripture? Does God tell us to find a church where we are all of the same mind? Is that what God’s word describes when it talks about unity in the local church? When He 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.

We are called to worship God with our entire lives, with all that we are and do. It is not something we do only when we are gathered together (I’m deliberately avoiding the phrase “when we’re at church”), we the church- the people of God, are commanded to worship him at all times. But, there is a biblically prescribed way that we are to worship corporately in the local church and that is the clarity I want us to see.

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!

It’s critically important for us to understand this about the church because many churches with good intentions have sought to reach unbelievers by focusing the attention of their corporate worship towards appealing to them. Sadly, the fruit of this approach is church gatherings all around the world, especially here in America, that have so watered down the worship of God when they gather in order not to offend unbelievers, that the corporate worship of Jesus has become non-existent in many of these so-called churches.

Remember, 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.

Hopefully, you are not hearing me minimize our call to evangelize the lost in any way. If you are hearing that, then hopefully this next part of our answer will bring more clarity.

It says:

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.

Samuel the prophet is speaking to king Saul here after God had just given them victory in a battle in which they were commanded to devote the Amalekites to complete destruction, every person and all of their animals. King Saul held back slaughtering the best of the animals in order to offer them as a sacrifice to the Lord and this was God’s response through the prophet Samuel.

God does not tell him “your heart was in the right place.” Because of his disobedience, God rejected him as king of Israel. He presumed to think that God would be ok with him disobeying because he had thought of a better idea. He was arrogant enough to think that he could come up with a thought all on his own that would somehow impress God. God help us not to take His commands so lightly.

God’s word has given us clear instruction on how we are to worship Him. We will look closer at some of these instructions in our 2nd question tonight and over the next 2 weeks we will learn more about Scriptures’ commandments regarding the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s supper which are both vital parts of worship in the local church.

Fulfilling the commands and mission God has given the church has been covered pretty thoroughly over the last few weeks as we looked at prayer, the great commission and making disciples. As we move in to our 2nd question, I want to pay particular attention to why the local church is so important in accomplishing this.

**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.

**Philippians 2:3** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Our answer lists 6 distinct duties within the local church. I am going to go through them all one at a time.

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.

The Scriptures, that is- the written Word- the Old and New Testaments, are breathed out by God, meaning they are His words that are written on the pages. That is how God communicates to the church today. And it goes on to say that it is profitable-useful-beneficial for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete-[lacking in nothing- he doesn’t need to go to some other source than the Scriptures to supplement any lack],… equipped for every good work- [again…***every*** good work.]

Too many churches have made the mistake of thinking they can improve on God’s design for the church by looking to modern philosophy, business models, marketing techniques, etc., but God’s Word is authoritative and sufficient for us to be complete and equipped for every good work.

I am not going to spend any more time on this point because it has been so thoroughly taught on over the last few years and even as recently as a few weeks ago when Steve preached a sermon called Two Worldviews that was all about the topic of scriptural authority. I highly encourage you to go back and listen to it if you missed it.

I only want to re-emphasize how important it is for the ***local church*** to be submitting to the Bible. That means more than just individuals submitting to it, that means that the heartbeat of the whole church, especially the leadership is boldly and unapologetically raising up Scripture as the standard by which every sermon is preached and every ministry decision is made and acted upon.

If you are ever in a position where you are considering moving to another city, one of the deciding factors needs to be- is there a local church that truly submits to the authority of Scripture. This is not always an easy thing to discern just by looking at a website or visiting for a few Sundays. It may require some very thorough investigating. Carelessly becoming a part of a church that does not submit to the authority of Scripture could have eternal consequences. I would go so far as to say that if you cannot find a good church and your purpose in moving there is not to plant one, you should take that as clear confirmation from God that He is not calling you there.

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.

How can I truly benefit from someone’s care and guidance if they don’t know me and I don’t know them?

**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—

We know that the early churches were named after the town they were in, right? The church of Ephesus, the church in Corinth, etc…So I wonder why Paul didn’t say that he had left Titus there to appoint elders in every church? Why did he say every town? -------Because he was putting what remained into order. There was still work that remained before the churches in those towns were established as actual churches. The churches in those towns were not established yet because they did not have elders.

Paul goes on in the following verses to give clear and specific instruction for the required qualifications of these elders.

These towns that were full of believers whom Paul and his companions had led to Christ were not part of a local church yet because they did not have biblically qualified elders to lead them yet. Paul and Titus’ relationship to them was not enough to establish them as a local church because they were not an ongoing presence in those towns and not a part of these believers’ daily lives.

Do you see the implications of that? A church without biblically qualified elders is not a true church.

Parachurch organizations are Christian organizations that often operate independently from church oversight. They do not have elders. They are not a “type” of church. Para is a Greek word meaning beside or alongside. So, these groups are designed to assist the church in its mission. A few examples are Navigators, Youth for Christ, and even Radius International. There is nothing inherently wrong with parachurch groups. In fact, some of them are doing great kingdom work. Radius is one of our missions partners that we support.

However, an unfortunate problem with parachurch groups is that some of them have allowed themselves to become a substitute for the local church. Another problem is that most of these organizations are non-comital regarding important truths in Scripture and they often end up watering down any doctrinal stance to the lowest common agreement. We have to exercise careful discernment when we are committing to partner with any of these groups.

Another all too common problem is that people will get very involved in serving with one of these groups and then decide that they really don’t need to be a committed member of a local church while they are faithfully serving in the parachurch. As good as it is for people to be sacrificially serving the Lord in these organizations, if it becomes the reason they are not a committed member of a local church, it is sin and their spiritual condition is going to be very negatively affected.

Remember, the local church is the means God has chosen to build up the body and equip them for service. When Christians begin to think they can be built up and equipped just as well by serving in a parachurch, they are losing the very thing God has given them to ensure that they are being equipped to serve well.

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.

Someone has counted that there are at least 59 of these “one another” passages in Scripture. 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. The people of Bakersfield may not know the individual members of Disciples Church, but it is possible for them to know of the extraordinary love we have for one another.

In the account of Paul’s conversion in Acts 9, Jesus presents Himself to Paul, knocking Him down, and asks him “why are you persecuting ME?”- not why are you persecuting my people? Jesus so identifies with His people that He does not even distinguish himself from them.

Many professing Christians want to claim that they don’t need the church- that they are part of the universal church and need no leader but Christ. That sounds very pious, but it is not what Jesus says. The church is to function as a body with Christ as the head. For someone to say I don’t need the local church, I only need Christ, is to say I don’t want anything to do with Christ’s body. I prefer to have Him decapitated so that I can have His head all to myself.

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. Our time spent worshipping together on Sunday mornings has become so important for Laurie and I that we have begun scheduling our vacations from Sunday night to Saturday whenever possible so that we don’t have to miss a day of being with our church family.

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. The primary action here is love, not service. We have so many members who display this quality here in our church. Let us remember to always look for ways to be reciprocating that love to those who love and care for our kids, set up chairs, and vacuum floors. They are not just serving God, they are also serving US as an extension of their love for God.

I have honestly never seen it here in our people, but I have seen evidence that it is possible to serve people without loving them. There are people who will get in and serve and work hard to help out, but seem to have no interest in the people they are serving.

We can’t just see this as a box to check off. Yes, I’ve fulfilled my duty. 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, each person who makes up the local church we are serving.

There’s an old Charlie Brown comic where he says, “I love humanity, it’s people I can’t stand.”

I am ashamed to say that I have been guilty, and I think I’m not alone, of claiming to love the church while holding animosity toward one of its members. We must recognize the contradiction when we are guilty of this and then repent of it by seeking restoration out of a heart of love for God and for His people. As Matt taught in his lesson on Christian accountability and discipline, even when we have to break fellowship with a brother and go so far as to commit their body to destruction, it is to be done from a heart of love in hopes that their soul will be saved.

The world defines love as an emotion that comes and goes, but God defines love as a choice, a commitment to someone else’s wellbeing. Don’t ever let a lack of emotion prevent you from making the choice to love your brother.

**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…

If you are not already serving somewhere in some way, I encourage you to talk with one of the leaders to see where the gifts God has given you can be put to use in service to the body. Do not think that your gift is insignificant. You may not even realize that you have a gift, but if you are a part of the church, then God has gifted you to play a part in the function of the body you are a member of.

1. Practice higher levels of accountability.

Matt also covered this last week. The point I want to emphasize again is how important this is especially in the local church. We are a church who sees this command clearly in Scripture and believe that God’s commands are good and loving, therefore it would be unloving for us not to hold one another accountable. Our church has had some pruning over the course of our return to more biblical accountability. Some have decided that they are not interested in a church where they cannot come and remain anonymous in the back row. We love you too much to let you remain comfortable in not being accountable.

**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. It is something to be thankful for. I got emotional thinking about this as I was writing my notes. I know that I could bring a large number of you up here right now to give testimony of your thankfulness for the admonishment and accountability you have recently received. I know how thankful I am for the loving accountability I have received in my own life.

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

This higher level of accountability that we give and receive is one of the most beneficial functions of the local church. Those who think they can do the Christian life without the local church are blind to the benefits of the thing they are afraid of.

1. Live missional lives together.

Praise God that here at Disciples Church we have learned that it is not the pastor’s and staff’s job to do all the work of evangelism.

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. From there, we are all going back out into a world of unbelievers and taking the gospel to them and making disciples.

All of the wonderful benefits we experience together as the local church is not meant to end on us. We are to be on mission, making worshippers of God among people(s) who are currently not worshipping Him. That means going out from our place of worship to places where God is not worshipped.

It also means understanding that our presence in the world is designed by God for missional purposes. In other words, 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.

I want to end by reading both questions and answers together again.

**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.

This is what we get to do!!! ARE YOU DOING THESE THINGS? IF NOT, JUMP IN. IF YOU ARE, HOW CAN YOU GROW? THIS IS WHAT WE MUST TALK ABOUT TONIGHT IN OUR GROUPS. Let’s take serious this call and each of our parts in these things.

Let’s pray.