

Discipleship Lesson 13

The Local Church

Key Memory Verse:

*Now you are the body of Christ,
and members individually.*

1 Corinthians 12:27



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As you study this lesson you will understand why the following statements are **not true**.

1. The local church is primarily for weddings, funerals, and religious holidays.
2. The church should focus only on social or political movements.
3. Only the *leadership* of the church is charged with any responsibility of meeting people's spiritual needs.

What Is the Purpose of My Involvement in a Local Church?

God has established three institutions on this earth: the family, civil government, and the local church. It is the local church which has been commissioned by God to carry out His purposes in reaching the lost and maturing the saved. Therefore, God's plan for a Christian will always be best fulfilled as a part of the local church.

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to define what the church is, the biblical purpose of the church, what our function is in the church, and how to find the right church in which to place our membership.

I. What Is the Church?

- A. The Greek word for *church* is *ecclesia*. It is used 115 times in the New Testament. Its primary meaning is “a called-out assembly.”
- B. The word *church* appears for the first time in the New Testament in Matthew 16:18, where the Lord Jesus makes it clear that He will build His church and all the powers of hell will not be able to

Is this a picture of the church on offense or defense?

- C. We must understand that the church is not a building. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel worshipped God in a temple.
 - 1. What does Paul describe as the temple of God in 1Corinthians 6:19–20?
 - 2. Look up and give the biblical description (word picture) of the church from the following verses.

Ephesians 1:22–23

Revelation 19:7

1 Peter 5:1–4

1 Peter 2:4–5, 9 (four things)

Read 1 Timothy 3:15 (two things)

This verse teaches that the church is the _____
and _____ of the truth.

II. What Drives the Church?

- A. The dictionary's definition of the word *drive* is "to guide, control, or direct." When you drive a car, it means you guide, control, and direct it down the street.

Every church is driven by something. There is a guiding force, a controlling assumption, a directing conviction behind everything that happens. It may be unspoken. It may be unknown to many. What is the driving force behind your church? Examples are: tradition, social needs, Bible study, evangelism, worship, finances, discipleship, etc.

- B. What we need today are churches that are driven by purpose instead of by other forces. The starting point for every church should be the question "**Why do we exist?**"

1. Until you know why or what your church exists to do, you have no foundation, no motivation, and no direction for ministry.

Strong churches are *not* built on programs, personalities, or gimmicks. They are built on the eternal purposes of God.

2. A clear purpose not only defines what we do; it defines what we do not do. When a church forgets its purpose, it has a difficult time deciding what is important. An indecisive church is an unstable church.

C. Two Great Scriptures

Although many passages describe what the church is to be and do, two statements by Jesus summarize it all: The Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37–40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20).

What two things did Jesus command us to do in Matthew 22:37–40?

- 1.
- 2.

What three things did Jesus command us to do in Matthew 28:19–20?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

III. The Five Purposes of the Church

- A. Purpose One: Love the Lord with all your heart (Matthew 22:37).

The word that describes this purpose is *worship*.

1. The Bible says, "you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve" (Matthew 4:10). Notice that worship comes before service. Worshipping God is the church's first purpose. Sometimes we get so busy working for God, we don't have time to express our love to Him through worship.
2. Throughout Scripture we are commanded to celebrate God's presence by magnifying the Lord and exalting His name.

What does Psalm 34:3 tell us to do?

3. All creation exists to praise Him. Read Psalm 148.

An exercise which occupies the full time of angels in heaven, and in which heavenly citizens will engage in eternity, surely could not be a waste of time to mortals on earth. One may be sure that time spent in praise will never prove to be time wasted but will, in fact, prove all else done in the light of it more worthwhile.

- B. Purpose Two: Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39).

The word that describes this purpose is *ministry*.

The church exists to minister to people. Ministry is demonstrating God's love to others by meeting their needs and healing their hurts in the name of Jesus. Personal discipleship is one of the best ways to fulfill this purpose.

- C. Purpose Three: Go and make disciples (Matthew 28:19).

The word that describes this purpose is *evangelism*.

The church exists to communicate God's Word. We are ambassadors for Christ, and our mission is to evangelize the world. It is every Christian's responsibility to share the good news wherever we go. Evangelism is more than our responsibility; it is our great privilege. We are invited to be a part of bringing people into God's eternal family. There is no greater cause to give your life to than reaching your friends for Christ.

Notes and Questions



Notes and Questions:

D. Purpose Four: Baptizing them (Matthew 28:19).

The word that describes this purpose is *fellowship*.

At first glance, you might wonder why the Great Commission gives the same prominence to the simple act of baptism as it does to the great task of evangelism and edification. Obviously, Jesus did not mention it by accident. Why is baptism so important as to warrant inclusion in Christ's Great Commission? Because it symbolizes one of the purposes of the church: fellowship—identification with the body of Christ.

As Christians we are called to belong, not just to believe. We are not meant to live Lone Ranger lives. We belong to Christ's family and are members of His body. Baptism is not only a symbol of salvation; it is a symbol of fellowship.

E. Purpose Five: Teaching them to obey (Matthew 28:20).

The word that describes this purpose is *discipleship*.

Discipleship is the process of helping people become more like Christ in their thoughts, feelings, and actions. This process begins when a person first becomes a Christian and continues throughout the rest of his or her life (Colossians 1:28).

As the church, we are called not only to reach out to others but also to teach them. After someone has made a decision for Christ, he or she must be discipled. It is the responsibility of the church to develop people to spiritual maturity. This is God's will for every believer (Ephesians 4:12b-13).

While each church will differ in how these tasks are accomplished, there should be no disagreement about what we are called to do. Every church must be able to define its purposes and then design a process or system for fulfilling those purposes. Successful ministry is building the church on the purposes of God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and expecting results from God.

IV. Biblical Functions of Every Local Church

- A. Every local church should evaluate itself against the biblical model found in Acts 2:41–47. If you are looking for a new church to join, this list is a good way to examine the churches that you visit.
 1. What two functions of the church do you see in verse 41?
 2. What four functions of the church do you see in verse 42? This church had a testimony of seeing God do great things through them (verse 43). This church loved people and was assisting them with their needs (verses 44–45). This church was evangelistic, reaching out into its community (verses 46–47). This church was worshipping and praising God (verse 47).
- B. Can you find the five *purposes* of the church in the functions of the first church in Jerusalem? (Worship, evangelism, ministry, fellowship, and discipleship.)

V. What Is the Believer's Role in the Church?

- A. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–27. Paul compares the church body to the human body. Why do you think God wants us to understand that the local church should function like a human body?

If a person causes division in the church body and will not stop when lovingly confronted (Matthew 18:15), what should the church leadership do? Review Titus 3:10–11.

- B. God wants every believer to be a part of and function through a local New Testament church. As incredible, wonderful, and sophisticated as the human heart is, it was never made to be just a heart but a part of a body. It has no value to the body outside of the body, nor can it thrive anywhere but in the body.

As incredible and wonderful as God made you, you were never made just to be an individual believer but a part of a body. Just as every organ and every cell is meant to be a member of the human body, so every true believer is meant to be a member of a local body of Christ.



Notes and Questions:

C. There are numerous benefits to church membership.

1. It identifies a person as a genuine believer (Ephesians 2:19).
2. It provides a spiritual family to support and encourage you in your walk with Christ (Galatians 6:1–2; Hebrews 10:24–25).
3. It gives you a place to discover and use your gifts in ministry (1 Corinthians 12:4–27).
4. It places you under the spiritual protection of godly leaders (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28–29).
5. It gives you the accountability you need to grow (Ephesians 5:21).
6. Church discipline only makes sense in the context of membership (1 Corinthians 5).

VI. Practical Application

A. Are you an active member in a local assembly of believers? If not, why not?

B. If you are not currently involved in a ministry of the church, what ministry would you be interested in serving in, if you had the time?

C. Every church should always strive to improve. Is there an area of ministry that you feel your church needs to improve upon? Please explain this need to your discipler.

D. Name two important truths or principles that stood out to you from this lesson.

1. _____

2. _____