

ECCLESIOLOGY
THE LOCAL CHURCH
Lesson 8

General Observations About the Local Church

- I. DEFINITION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH: A group of professing Christians (and their children) in a given locality who have organized themselves for the purpose of doing the will and work of God.

- II. ENTRANCE INTO THE LOCAL CHURCH
 - A. Some Independents. Some Christians believe only belief in the Lord Jesus Christ is the criterion for being a member of a local church. There are no more requirements to enter the local church than the universal church.
 - B. Baptists and Independents. Belief in Christ and water baptism by immersion are required for membership. Some Baptists require baptism by immersion in their particular Baptist church or denomination.
 - C. Presbyterians. Most Presbyterians require a credible profession of faith in Christ, water baptism (any mode) and a testimony before the elders.
 - D. Roman Catholics. A person is born into the Roman Church and is saved and sealed at water baptism.

- III. CORRECT THINKING ABOUT THE LOCAL CHURCH
 - A. A church is not where two or three are gathered (Matt. 18:20). There must be organization with officers.
 - B. A church is not a building but it is people. It is not a place where we go to be entertained. The church gathers to worship God and be equipped to do ministry.
 - C. A church is not a social gathering of people. It is the church gathered to do the will and work of God under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
 - D. The word “church” is from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means “called-out ones” (*ek* and *kaleo*). It refers to the universal church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18) and the local church (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1). As nearly as possible the local church should be a reflection of the universal church. While there is no perfect local church, every church should be made up of true believers (and their children.)

- IV. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE LOCAL CHURCH
 - A. The organization of the early church had officers—elders and deacons (Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13). The organization was mainly patterned after the synagogue worship and developed in a gradual manner. In Acts 6, servants, possibly deacons, were chosen and appointed to relieve the Apostles of many duties. Acts 8:1 tells us that persecutions caused the Christians to leave Jerusalem and more churches were needed in outlying areas. There arose, therefore, the need of elders (Acts 11:30).

- B. At first the early church gathered daily (Acts 2:46), but apparently, as the church grew numerically and spread through the Roman Empire, it became a practical necessity to meet at an appointed time—Sunday, the Lord’s Day, the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Although we cannot definitely prove it, probably most of the meetings were at night because the slaves and others had to work all day, for Sunday was not a recognized holiday for either Jews or Romans.
- C. The early church in Jerusalem met in the temple and in homes (Acts 2:46). We may conclude that the early church was not opposed to meeting in a building, but when persecution came they were forced out of the temple and into homes. After this there is no mention of a church building for over 200 years. Therefore, we may conclude that a building is nice but not necessary to a proper functioning of a local church.
- D. Church meetings were organized and regulated (1 Cor. 14:26-28, 34-35, 40).
- E. The church exercised discipline on its members (1 Cor. 5:13; Rom. 16:17).
- F. The church took care of the sick and widows (1 Tim. 5:9-10).
- G. The church collected money for the Lord’s work (2 Cor. 8, 9; 1 Cor. 16:1-2).
- H. Churches wrote letters of commendation.

V. THE NECESSITY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

- A. Why is the local church necessary?
 - 1. God ordained it.
 - 2. It is the basic unit for all of the Lord’s work.
 - 3. It is still the most practical way to get the task of building the saints and world evangelism done.
 - 4. It is the primary place to carry out church discipline, teaching of the Word and observing of the sacraments (ordinances).
 - 5. It is the only place that can minister to the whole man—from birth to death.
- B. What about para-church organizations outside the organized church?
 - 1. They are necessary only if the local church is not doing its particular ministry.
 - 2. They are helpful in crossing and bridging denominational lines.
 - 3. They must always be an arm of the church.
 - 4. Whenever a local church or churches do a ministry well, the para-church organization should move out.
 - 5. There will always be a need for para-church organizations because the church will never rise to its full potential.
 - 6. Para-church organizations will come and go but the organized church will be on earth until Christ returns.
- C. What is necessary and what is nice in the local church?
 - 1. Necessary
 - a. Preached Word
 - b. Sacraments
 - c. Church discipline
 - d. Training the saints
 - e. Worship

2. Nice but not necessary
 - a. Buildings
 - b. Music programs, choirs
 - c. Youth programs
 - d. Sunday School programs, etc.

VI. CONTRASTING THE LOCAL CHURCH AND THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Universal Church

- A. Includes all Christians (Eph. 1:22, 23).
- B. Only Christians belong to this body (Eph. 5:25-27).
- C. Perfected forever positionally in Christ (Heb. 10:14).
- D. Held together by Christ whose building we are (Eph. 2:19-22).
- E. No Christians ever excluded (John 17; Eph. 1:4, 7, 13).

Local Church

- A. A group of organized Christians (Rom. 16:1; Acts 8:1).
- B. Should include only Christians and their children (1 Cor. 1:2) but no guarantee all are regenerate (1 John 2:19).
- C. Not perfect and are constantly exhorted to Christian growth (1 Cor. 1:11; Phil. 3:12-13).
- D. Held together by mutual consent and certain articles of agreement, hopefully from the Bible.
- E. Fellowship withdrawn because of sin (2 Thess. 3:14; 1 Cor. 5:13).