**The Local Church and Me**

*Ephesians 1:22-23*

**Introduction**

1. That the church is according to God’s eternal purpose is indisputable:
   1. **Ephesians 1:9-10** – God’s will was the summing up of all things in Christ.
   2. **Ephesians 1:22-23** – the church is His fullness.
   3. **Ephesians 3:10-11** – the church is according to God’s eternal purpose accomplished in Christ.
   4. **Ephesians 3:20-21** – God is glorified in the church by Christ.
2. God adds individuals to the church – **Acts 2:40-41, 47**
3. The church is designed to function on the local level – **Romans 16:16**
4. As an individual Christian, what is my relation to the church, and what responsibilities do I have to fulfill?
5. The Church on the Local Level
6. The Universal Church
   1. There is one body – **Ephesians 4:4**
   2. Whole family – **Ephesians 3:14-15**
   3. General assembly – **Hebrews 12:23**
   4. All who are saved – **Acts 2:47** – all saved individuals comprise the church, not all local churches together.
   5. Christ is head – **Colossians 1:18** – preeminence
      1. No other organization than Christ as head.
      2. No universal function – all functions of the church are seen on the local level.
7. The Local Church – The Fullness of Him Who Fills All in All
   1. The church is the fullness of Christ – **Ephesians 1:22-23**
      1. This is true in the universal sense.
      2. Yet, it is only in the local sense that it is functionally observable.
         1. **Acts 20:28** – Jesus purchased universal church w/ His blood, but it is the church in Ephesus that Paul is referring to.
         2. ***“the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers”*** – **cf. 1 Peter 5:2**
         3. Plural – **Romans 16:16**
   2. Filled with the fulness of God to His glory in the church – **Ephesians 3:14-21** – ***“by Christ Jesus”*** (i.e. as He fills us – in our hearts by faith)
   3. Fullness of Christ to God’s glory locally. EX: **Philippians 1:1, 11**
   4. The importance of the church cannot be divorced from its local sense.
8. The Local Church and Me
9. Can I faithfully exist separate from a local church?
   1. Is the concept of a “floating membership” scriptural?
   2. **1 Peter 5:2** – ***“among you”*** – implies NOT beyond you.
   3. Elders in every church/city – **Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5**
      1. Who were they overseeing?
      2. How were they to know?
      3. Come and go? In and out of membership weekly?
   4. If the “floating membership” was legitimate, and all adapted it, would there be churches to float to?
      1. ***“To the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2)***.
      2. ***“To the saints who are in Ephesus” (Ephesians 1:1)***.
      3. ***“To the church of the Thessalonians” (1 Thessalonians 1:1)***.
      4. ***“To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1)***.
      5. Possible without local church structure? (Letters written to groups. If disjointed, floating members, where does the letter go?) (**cf. Colossians 4:16** – read among you, in the church)
10. Paul and Phoebe
    1. Paul as an example of the necessity of local church membership – **Acts 9:26-28** – tried to join, fellowship denied (autonomy and church obligation), vouched for, regular activity “with them”
       1. Sent out – **Acts 13:1-3** – ***“in the church that was at Antioch”***
       2. Returned – **Acts 14:25-28** – ***“stayed there a long time”***
    2. Phoebe as an example of the necessity of local church membership – **Romans 16:1-2**
       1. A member at Cenchrea (port of Corinth) – regular.
       2. Commended by Paul to brethren at Rome – were to receive her – temporarily in Rome.
    3. The necessity of joining a local group of believers, and subjecting oneself to that eldership, is apparent in the New Testament pattern.
11. The Local Church and Me – Responsibilities
12. It is easy for members to fall into the category of feeling like they don’t have a great responsibility:
    1. Not an elder, deacon, preacher, teacher, song leader, etc.
    2. Feeling unimportant – **cf. 1 Corinthians 12:15-16**
    3. Or even being so overwhelmed by all there is to do that we do nothing, or neglect the most important fundamental responsibilities we have.
    4. There are responsibilities we all have that are vital to the success of the local church in bringing God glory.
13. Mature in the Faith
    1. The work of the church summed up – **Philippians 1:27**
       1. The faith of individuals coming together is what makes this collective striving.
       2. Each member must grow themselves, or the church cannot fulfill this action.
    2. **Strong, sound church – not simply strong eldership, not simply strong preaching, but strong members who individually take responsibility for their own faith.**
    3. **Ephesians 4:11-16** – speaks of Christ’s provisions for the edification of the body, but it is accomplished through each individual’s growth, and thus contribution to the body of which they are a part.
       1. **(v. 11)** – not everyone is one of these, but **(v. 7)** – to each one of us grace was given.
          1. **(v. 12a)** – ***“for”*** – *pros* – toward – each saint being equipped. (with a view to)
          2. **(v. 12b)** – ***“for”*** – *eis* – unto – each involved in work of ministry (i.e. as a result of the equipment of each). (unto the purpose of)
          3. **(v. 12c)** – ***“for”*** – *eis* – unto – edification of body (by the work of each individual). (unto the purpose of)
          4. ***“for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ” (ASV)***
       2. Results:
          1. **(v. 13)** – each united together in the faith as mature in Christ.
             1. Negative – **(v. 14)** – maturity means not immature, and naïve, being susceptible to false teaching – that could affect the body.
          2. **(vv. 15-16)** – the body edifies itself – THROUGH EACH PART CONTRIBUTING VIA THEIR OWN GROWTH.
       3. App: sermons (attentive), bible classes (do lesson), gospel meetings, resources supplied, extra studies, etc.
          1. These are not passive, but interactive – you have a great part to play.
          2. IT DOES AFFECT THE REST OF THE BODY – when you aren’t growing, then the church is not growing (at least to the capacity it could and should).
    4. Your individual maturity is the safeguard against congregational apostasy:
       1. **1 Timothy 4:1-6** – apostasy will occur, but only because individuals allow themselves to be deceived.
          1. **(vv. 3-5)** – those who are knowledgeable and faithful don’t bite.
          2. **(v. 6)** – such, in part, comes from the instruction supplied.
          3. **(vv. 12-13, 16)** – the preaching of the truth equips each to stand against error, and for the truth.
       2. **2 Timothy 2:16-18** – the message of error will spread like cancer.
          1. What prevents the spread – preaching truth, but beyond that is each individual believing it, and standing for it.
          2. **2 Timothy 1:1-2** – first thing mentioned after exhorting to stand strong in grace is committing truth to others, who then do the same.
             1. **These will not simply teach others.**
             2. **These will be a voice which speaks out against error.**
       3. **DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR PERSONAL GROWTH – IT IS NOT THE FAITH OF OTHERS THAT WILL MAKE THE LOCAL CHURCH STRONG, BUT YOUR FAITH.**
14. Keep Yourself Pure
    1. Do not underestimate the effect your individual choices in matters of morality have on the local church.
       1. Some think as long as they’re in agreement doctrinally that their other choices won’t be of consequence to the church.
       2. **Personal purity contributes to the purity of others – namely, the church.**
    2. Christ died for the purity of the church – **Ephesians 5:25-27**
       1. Each individual was a part of that purchase, and purification to His glory – **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**
       2. Each individual contributes to, or takes away from the purity of the church – **1 Timothy 5:22; 6:11**
    3. A little leaven leavens the whole lump (and not just with error) – **1 Corinthians 5:6-8** – concerning the sexually immoral man.
       1. **(vv. 1-2)** – Pride despite the sin in their midst – thought they were strong enough to where the sin didn’t affect them (**cf. 4:8, 18** – pride addressed)
       2. **(v. 6)** – the sin of the one affects the whole.
          1. Their toleration or indifference toward the brother’s sin made them unsound.
          2. **(vv. 7-8)** – despite their claim to serve Christ, and be associated with the purity of His sacrifice they had leaven in their midst.
       3. Their willingness to let such a sin go unaddressed would inevitably lead to a lax approach to growing immorality among others.
    4. Abound in purity – **1 Thessalonians 4:1-4**
       1. **(v. 1)** – abound more and more – superlative noting a constant progress, no matter the magnitude of prior progress.
       2. **(vv. 3-4)** – specifically, abounding in sanctification, more specifically, sexual purity.
          1. They were to continue to pursue sexual purity.
          2. **(v. 4)** – there are many ways to possess our bodies in this way which can increase.
    5. A snapshot of increasing in purity – **Romans 13:11-14**
       1. **(vv. 11-12)** – approaching salvation demands sobriety.
       2. **(v. 13)** – practical look:
          1. **Revelry** (kōmos) (greater) and **drunkenness** (methē) (lesser) – not drunken carousing, but not even intoxication period.
          2. **Lewdness** (koitē – euphemism, couch, promiscuity) (greater) and **lust** (aselgeia) (lesser) – not being promiscuous, but not even unchaste and licentious.
          3. **Strife** (*eris* – quarrel, contention) (greater) and **envy** (*zēlos*) lesser – not being quarrelsome with each other, but not even harboring feelings that get us there.
       3. **(v. 14)** – standard of purity – CHRIST – not even providing for flesh.
       4. App: from dress to entertainment to speech, we must be careful to maintain purity.
    6. **YOUR DEVOTION TO PURITY WILL BE AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHERS, AND WILL INCREASE SENSITIVITY TO MATTERS OF IMPURITY.**
15. Possess the Mind of Christ
    1. Maturing in the faith includes possessing the mind of Christ.
       1. However, if we are merely intellectually advancing, and even morally, Satan can still hurt the church.
       2. Much is said about the personal dispositions which presuppose the existence of unity in addition to the foundation of the truth.
    2. **Philippians 2:1-8** – exhortation to mutual love in like-mindedness through humility and self-lessness.
       1. **(v. 1)** – the foundation of the appeal – blessings from Christ.
       2. **(v. 2)** – the appeal to likeminded love.
       3. **(vv. 3-4)** – the disposition and following application.
          1. This attitude and practice will prevent any matter from leading to division.
          2. If unity in truth and morality are present, but there is not the attitude of deference among the brethren, division looms.
          3. Must not be selfish, but care for each other – **cf. 1 Corinthians 12:25-26**
       4. **(vv. 5-8)** – the standard of imitation – Christ’s humble service in submission to God’s will for us.
    3. **Ephesians 4:1-3** – unity of the Spirit, based on the reconciling of Jew and Gentile in one body through the cross, is spoken of as current, but MUST BE KEPT.
       1. ***“endeavoring to keep”*** – to make great effort to guard.
       2. **(v. 2)** – humility and mildness, the attitude of forbearance and the act itself, a key to guarding unity.
       3. **(v. 3)** – ***“in the bond of peace”*** – what binds us together is peace.
          1. ***“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18).***
    4. **Romans 14:14-20** – Paul speaking against letting matters of no spiritual consequence disrupt a congregation because of a lack in possessing the mind of Christ.
       1. **(v. 15)** – grieving, not loving.
       2. **(v. 17)** – missing the whole point.
       3. **(vv. 19-20)** – tearing down, not building up.
    5. In Faith, Unity; In Opinion, Liberty; In All things, Love
       1. Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace means:
          1. No tolerance in matters of truth – “In matters of faith, unity.” **(v. 17** – righteousness in HS)
          2. Tolerance in matters of indifference to God – “In matters of opinion, liberty.” (**v. 14** – nothing unclean itself)
          3. Always acting with love – “In all things, love.” (**vv. 15-16** – not destroy brother with liberty)
       2. Willingness to forgo liberties for the sake of brethren **– 1 Corinthians 8:13**
    6. **App: distinguish between truth and opinion, between spiritual substance and vain talk, and disdain the latter.**
       1. **Galatians 5:14-15, 26** – love, not bite and devour.
16. Worship Faithfully
    1. It is God’s desire that we worship Him – **John 4:23-24**
    2. Worship to Him can be individual, but it His desire that His children come together collectively to worship Him – **Acts 2:42, 46** – ***“fellowship”*** notes joint participation, as well as **verse 46**.
       1. This means each one coming together has a responsibility.
       2. This is not a passive matter, but an activity we are each to be engaged it – equally.
       3. **Acts 20:7** – disciples came together regularly!
    3. We are not to forsake such – **Hebrews 10:24-25** – you are missed at worship whether you know it or not.
       1. Your attendance, or lack thereof, affects the congregation for good or bad.
       2. NOTE: You can forsake while being physically present (**cf. 1 Corinthians 11:29**).
    4. Your faithful worship with the brethren is an important responsibility that provides:
       1. Edification – **1 Corinthians 14:12, 26** – come together for edification.
          1. What worship can do for others – **Acts 16:25, 30** – listening to their worship, and knew to ask.
          2. Teaching and admonishing each other – **Colossians 3:16** ***(“speaking to one another” – Ephesians 5:19)***
          3. Joint participation in the preaching – **Acts 17:11; Nehemiah 8:1-8** (book read, reverence, worship, understanding given)
             1. Even just the attention and reverence given add significantly to the occasion.
       2. Encouragement – **Hebrews 3:12-13; 10:25** – context: Christians wavering through trial – exhortation/encouragement to faithfulness based on God’s faithfulness.
          1. **1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, 18** – comfort with words concerning Jesus’ coming and resurrection.
          2. Proclamation of the Lord’s death, and implicit coming – **1 Corinthians 11:26**
          3. Encouragement through songs, and effective prayer – **James 5:13-16**
       3. Accountability – **Hebrews 10:24** – provoking one another to do the Lord’s will.
          1. We need to push each other, and worship is a divinely prescribed way of doing so.
          2. **1 Thessalonians 5:14-22** – in meeting together to worship God we encourage, warn, comfort, incite joy and thanksgiving, and allow God’s word to convict us.
    5. Your faithfulness in worship is key for each in the congregation to feed off your adoration for God – **Romans 15:7-13**
       1. Context: Call for unity among Jew and Gentile, despite differences of conscience (**vv. 1-5).**
       2. **(vv. 7-9)** – like-mindedness and mutual reception based on Christ’s service to each (Circumcision and Gentiles).
          1. Received to the glory of God.
       3. Scripture quoted to show Gentile’s inclusion – (**vv. 9-12)** – Praise to God, call for Gentiles to join in rejoicing and praise, hope for Gentiles too.
          1. Adoration/praise breeds adoration/praise in others.
       4. **(v. 13)** – Both are given hope, joy, and piece in their knowledge of God’s will, and adherence to it – differences to be lost in their recognition of mutual benefit from God, and adoration for Him.
17. Redeem the Time with Those Outside
    1. Great work of the church – **Matthew 28:18-20** – evangelism.
       1. **Acts 8:3-4** – church, men and women, scattered and preaching.
       2. **Ephesians 4:11-12** – each member equipped for this work.
          1. **Acts 18:26** – not a designated person for evangelism, but effective through each member in their own individual context of opportunity.
    2. Paul’s prayer request should be ours – **Colossians 4:2-4** – do we feel compelled, or do we trust that others will do it for us (evangelism by proxy – the collective church)?
       1. Praying for open doors, and being watchful for them?
       2. We do not need (though it can be helpful) organized group outings for evangelism, but open eyes and ears to our surroundings. (Family, friends, coworkers, strangers, etc.)
    3. We need to buy up each opportunity – **Colossians 4:5-6**
       1. **(v. 5)** – Walk to be such that makes the most out of opportunities (Kairos not Chronos).
          1. Conduct which causes questions – **1 Peter 3:15**
          2. Be ready with answers.
       2. **(v. 6)** – character/speech to be such that leads to the conviction of others.
       3. “We are the only bible the careless world will read.”
    4. Your evangelistic efforts not only contribute to the increase in number, but act as a motivation for others to join the effort – **Acts 11:18, 22-26** – news of gospel preached to Gentiles led to greater involvement.
    5. It is your duty, as one who has benefited from the gospel, to share it with others – **Jeremiah 20:9** – is it a burning fire in your heart?
       1. If it is not, how do you think that will affect the local church?

**Conclusion**

1. It is God’s will that each individual Christian be joined to a local body of believers.
2. Christians cannot fulfill their obligations to God without involvement in the local church.
3. These very principles emphasize the fact that every member has a great deal of responsibility.
4. Your involvement is invaluable and cannot be replaced by another.
5. Am I fulfilling my role as a member of the local church?