

## THE LOCAL CHURCH: GOD'S PLAN

TEXT: Acts 2:41-47 [v.47] NKJV

**A) From the book of Acts and beyond, the New Testament is based on the fact that there were churches scattered throughout most of the known world at that time. As Jesus said in Acts 1:8 *“In Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”***

- 1) The second chapter of Acts is the story of the initial birth of the Church – the “Universal” Church as well as the first local church or assembly of believers.
  - a. The church in Jerusalem was the first local group of the *ecclesia* – the “called out ones”. This is what the new converts were being “added to”.
  - b. The end of the chapter describes their practices and the nature of their fellowship with one another.
- 2) Scripture teaches that the elders (pastors) will give an account to God for those given to their charge. This makes it clear that there were to be groups of believers who would be under the headship of an elder or pastor. That is, churches.
  - a. **Hebrews 13:17** *“Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.”*
  - b. **I Peter 5:3** *“not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”*
- 3) Paul makes it clear that God established the local church since He chose to give them men and women with giftings
  - a. **I Corinthians 12:28** *“And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.”*
- 4) Peter instructs believers to serve one another and he was speaking in the context of the local church
  - a. **I Peter 4:10** *“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”*

**B) God, in the NT, always speaks to and deals with CHURCHES – not just the “universal” church – but local churches. The clear contention implied all through the NT is that local bodies of believers – churches – are God’s plan and design.**

- 1) Paul wrote to churches, not individuals. He wrote to local bodies of believers in Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Phillipi, Colosse, Thessalonica, and Rome. And even his letters to Timothy and Titus were written to church leaders with instructions on serving their respective churches. Peter wrote to the believers scattered in Asia Minor – the various churches that were established there.
- 2) John, in the book of Revelation, addresses his vision to churches
  - a. Revelation 1:4 “John, to the seven churches that are in Asia...”
- 3) When the Holy Spirit wanted to speak to believers in the New Testament, he spoke to the churches. Why? Because this is where God expected believers to be – in a church – a local gathering of Christians.
  - a. **I Corinthians 14:33** *“For God is not the author of disorder but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”*
- 4) The author of Hebrews makes it abundantly clear that it was expected that believers, Christians, would make it a discipline or habit to come together as a church on a regular basis.
  - a. **Hebrews 10:25 [AMP]** *“not forsaking our meeting together [as believers for worship and instruction], as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more [faithfully] as you see the day [of Christ’s return] approaching.”*
- 5) Jesus Himself set the example of being in church faithfully
  - a. **Luke 4:16** *“He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.”*

**C) The NT is full of instruction and references to the conduct and practices of the church. The readers of the letters of Paul, Peter, Jude, James, and John understood that they were being addressed as a church.**

1. Jesus preceded the Apostle's instruction and teachings when He taught on the proper discipline of believers within the context of a local church setting
  - a. **Matthew 18:15-17** *"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the **church**; and if they refuse to listen even to the **church**, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."*
2. The existence of and instructions for the offices of leadership and ministry firmly establishes the institution of the local church. If there were no churches, there would be no leaders or pastors.
  - a. **I Thessalonians 5:12** *"Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you."*
  - b. **I Timothy 5:17** *"The elders who direct the affairs of the **church** well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching."*
3. Paul fully expected and assumed that believers would gather together as a church every Sunday – the first day of the week
  - a. **I Corinthians 16:2** *"On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made."*
4. Paul was always a part of a local church from the beginning of his conversion
  - a. **Acts 11:25-27** *"Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they **assembled with the church** and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."*
5. The word "church" is used **109** times in the KJV of the Bible from Acts through Revelation, and twice by Jesus in the book of Matthew.
6. Jesus established the foundation of the local church as a gathering of believers
  - a. **Matthew 18:20** *"For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."*
7. Paul admonished Timothy *"But if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."* – I Timothy 3:15