



# **‘THE JESUS APPRENTICESHIP’**

## **Session 11: Local Church**

### Why bother with the local church?

#### **Notes:**

There is a huge amount to say on this subject, but in order to keep our discussion coherent and cover the most important issues we have condensed our thoughts into three parts. First before considering why bother with the local church we looked at what we mean by local church.

#### What Is The Local Church?

The Bible describes the Church as:

- an assembly or gathered community of people
- the bride, betrothed to Jesus (2Cor 11:2, Eph 5:27, Rev 19:7)
- the Church of God – belonging to God, His household!! (Acts 20:28 & 1Tim 3:15)
- a family, God’s family!! (Eph 3:15)
- a flock, God’s flock (1Peter 5:2)
- a God’s building, field and temple (1Cor 3:9&16, Eph 2:19-22)

This makes it clear that “the church” is not a physical bricks and mortar/stone building, but the people. We do not GO to church, we ARE the church, but we have to be a born again Christian, in Christ, to be part of the Church. – That applies to all Christians all over the world; we are all part of the Universal Church, as all Christians of every century, age and race have been and are, we are part of the Universal Church, which spans heaven and earth, and the internet! The local church is a smaller part of this universal church that individuals can physically gather with, fellowship with and do life with. So...

#### Why Bother With The Local Church?

It is in the local church, that group of Christians that we meet with and commit to, that the wonderful concepts of the majestic Church of Christ get grounded in our everyday lives. In the local church we put into practice the principles of love, sharing the good news and all the “one anothers” set out in the bible. Each individual Christian has the Holy Spirit within them, therefore as we express love, kindness and affection for each other practically the life of God flows through us to minister to each other.

Romans 12:5 and 1Cor 12 tell us that we belong to each other. God has designed us to be together, the Holy Spirit in each of us desires to be in fellowship with other Christians; that is God's design and it causes us to grow in Christ (Prov 27:17). We are "living stones" and it is as we rub against each other that our rough edges get knocked off!

We need each other:

- Faith has to be personal, knowing Christ ourselves, but it is never private, we are connected by the Spirit (a bunch of grapes rather than a bag of marbles), and to think that we can live as Christians without other Christians neglects the spiritual realm by which we are all affected and through which we affect each other far more than through our physical efforts.
- In order to have a more complete revelation of God. God is far too big for one individual to comprehend alone; we need each other's perspective and presence to perceive Him more fully because we are all different.
- In order to withstand spiritual attacks, we cannot stand in the battle alone (Gal 6:1-5, Eccl 4:9-12, Prov 27:6, and Hebrews 10:24&25). The local church is an outpost or stronghold of heaven advancing against the kingdom of darkness.
- To call out each other's giftings and to provide opportunity to express those gifts. Individually we don't have all the gifts God lavishes on us, but all the gifts are found within the church as a whole, the body. Every gift is a gift to the body; we all bring something that blesses others. This is an expression of God that we can only experience as a local church. (These gifts are not just for Sunday mornings, loving and serving the body is not just volunteering for duties during Sunday services, but doing life together and we should be using our gifts as we live together).
- We cannot be a body on our own, nor can we show that we are Christ's disciples by loving each other on our own or over the internet.
- To magnify God in corporate worship (see Session 10!)

Read Ephesians 2:19-22 – as Christians we are fellow-citizens with other Christians and part of God's household, what an amazing privilege! We don't have any choice about that, so to refuse to be joined into the "temple" in practice would be both foolish and disobedient, in fact dishonouring, to God. In addition Hebrews 10:24&25 tell us to exhort each other and not to neglect meeting together.

However, if the church is as good as this, why do some of us shy away from it?

### What Causes People To Avoid Local Church And How Should We View Those Issues?

- **Hurts** – God is perfect and good all the time, but unfortunately we, his family, are not. We are all works in progress, broken and wounded in some way or other because of our sin and the sin of others. So, although the church is everything that has been said above, within the local church our woundings often collide with variously devastating consequences. It is extremely unlikely that anyone who has been in a local church for more than a couple of years has not been hurt by someone in church. This often causes people to leave that particular church and sometimes from church entirely.

This is very sad and it is important that amends are made. However, (in terms of general life hurts – sexual, physical or psychological abuse is another matter) where appropriate it is best if hurts can be worked through within the local church, because it is in trusting the Lord to bring us through such things that we know Him more. It is in working through our hurts that we become more like Jesus. We have to crucify self and learn to love those who are hard to love, to forgive and to submit even when we disagree, trusting that God has made the church, called people into positions and that we are called to that particular local church. We cannot learn such things on our own; we have to hang in there with all the other broken people.

In addition, leaving without resolving hurtful situations neglects the spiritual truths that we are all vessels of clay with treasure inside and that God is able to bring about amazing healing and beautiful outcomes despite us all, and that, the enemy of our souls wants to bring about destruction in the church. Let us not play his game.

- **Bad Press** – When there are serious incidences of spiritual or sexual abuse within a church the enemy loves this and the media usually has a field day. This understandably deters people from church everywhere, but we know this is not God's plan for the Church and neither is it His last word for the Church.

Although the Church is a spiritual entity and God's idea, unfortunately, in the West, many parts of the Church have fallen asleep and people are disinterested because it appears so boring! But where the Holy spirit is still invited in, those parts of the Church bear no resemblance to the stereotypical dry boring organisation often presented to the world.

The miracle is that the church survives despite persecution and indeed thrives despite our worst sin and mistakes. Matthew 16:18 tells us that God builds the Church and that hell will not stop it.

- **Wordliness And Pride** – Sadly the world’s mentality often permeates the Church, and currently there is a lot of “consumerism” in the Church. We start to think it is all about me and my preferences, so if we don’t like worship or the style of preaching we leave a church, but if we are there to serve others, our family, we do not simply walk away when it suits us. If we are simply consumers we do not deal with the roots of issues that cause us to be uncomfortable. We do not ask ourselves the hard questions about why we react as we do, and subsequently repent, becoming like Christ.

Pride often leads us to imagine that we can do things better or know better, but Phil 2:1-18 tells us to humble ourselves and consider others better than ourselves. However, we should be encouraged as much of the New Testament was written because of divisions and problems in the churches of the time, so we know that God brings great results from our difficulties. Issues within the Church are not failures but opportunities for us to grow.

- **A sense of Alienation** – Particularly in a large local church people can struggle to find a sense of belonging, they may feel that they have not connected with anyone well. In this case, rather than simply leaving it is often better to make the effort to “step in”, to join a small group, volunteer to help somewhere and embody that counter-cultural, self-sacrificial, loving organisation that the church is called to be.

**Recommended Resource – My Strange Bible Podcast “A Community of Good News”**