

LOCAL CHURCH OPPORTUNITIES

Discipleship II - Chapter 12

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Jesus said, “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). What a phenomenal promise of the church’s ultimate success.

The word “church” comes from the Greek word “ecclesia. which means to “call out.” A church then is a group of “called out ones.” A group of people who have been called out from the world through salvation which is in Christ Jesus. A “church” is not a denomination, it is not a building, it is not a religion. A church is a body of believers who have been called out of the world by the grace of God (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 2:19; Galatians 1:2).

The church is a particularly precious organization in the eyes of the Lord. The Apostle Paul uses the love of Christ for the church as the ultimate picture of love in his challenge to the husband, found in Ephesians 5:25. He says, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” Christ loved the church so much that He gave His life for it. Yet, many Christians have not made the church a priority in their spiritual life.

Every Christian should be familiar with the great opportunities found in the local church.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND

Our day is a day of activity. Days are packed with obligations. Vast amounts of time are taken by vocational responsibilities, educational endeavors, and recreational opportunities. Family time is squeezed out of many calendars to such a degree that the average American father now spends less than 30 seconds per day in meaningful communication with his children. Many Christians are concerned about their ability to attend church regularly while continuing to balance their other priorities.

We are admonished by the words of Hebrew 10:25, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” Christians are to assemble regularly in order to exhort one another - especially as the day of Christ’s coming draws closer.

In the Old Testament the man under the Law was obligated to journey to the Jerusalem temple three times each year. (Imagine the inconvenience to family, vocation, and livestock.) The book of Acts describes Christians who met together “daily” (Acts 2:46). These believers enjoyed no modern household convenience and no modern transportation. They met together at great personal expense.

Church attendance should be viewed as an absolute necessity. Church services provide a place for:

1. Personal and Public Evangelism (Matthew 28:18-20).
2. Personal and Public Encouragement (Ephesians 4:29).
3. United Prayer (Acts 4:23-31).
4. Fellowship (Acts 2:41-42; 12:5).
5. Accountability (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Christians should view church attendance as a great opportunity for Christian growth. Infrequent or sporadic church attendance is a violation of the direct teaching of Scripture (Hebrews 10:25) and places the individual in great spiritual jeopardy.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO JOIN

The Bible is clear. Church attendance is a priority! Likewise, the Bible clearly teaches principles which cause us to understand the necessity of church membership. When asking yourself, “should I join the church,” consider the following truths.

1. Church discipline necessitates church membership. Matthew 18:17 states, “And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglects to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

This verse teaches that the church (a specific group of people) has the authority to voice its opinion about those individuals who are violating Scripture. On occasion, when the violator will not change, the assembly is instructed to remove the violator. One must ask, how can a person who has never joined the assembly, by way of membership, ever be removed from the assembly? If the offender cannot be removed from the church, where then is church discipline and accountability?

2. The Bible teaches that individuals are to be “added” to the church (Acts 2:41,47). How can a person be added to a church when there is no membership?
3. Church government and business requires church membership. In Acts 6:1-5 the church as a group of believers selected certain individuals to be deacons. It appears that the church voted on those who would be deacons. Ask, “How can you vote without the group identity which membership provides?” Should churches be willing to allow everyone in attendance to vote regardless of his spiritual state?

You should consider church membership as an opportunity to make yourself accountable, as a way to be numbered with God's people, and as a way to join yourself in action with God's people. If you have not yet become a church member, you should do so quickly.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE

The Bible pictures the church as a living body which works together in harmony. "For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.... For the body is not one member, but many" (II Corinthians 12:12-14).

In the human body every member is important. Every member of the physical body depends on the other members for support and function. Likewise, in the church body every member plays a vital and specific role. Not all members function in the same way, but all members must function or the work of the body is hindered.

The local church offers the Christian a place in which to serve. Children's ministry, elderly ministry, physical labor, ushering, teaching, greeting, and many other opportunities are available.

In order for a christian to be happy he must serve. A Christian who fails to give through Christian service will become stagnant, complacent, and critical. The Christian who becomes actively involved in service will desire to learn more in order to serve better. He will also find great satisfaction and fulfillment as he allows Christ to work through him.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE

Christian con-artists have prospered in our generation. Televangelists have misrepresented needs, misappropriated funds, and caused great harm to the cause of Christ primarily because they lack the accountability and accessibility provided by the local church. The Bible teaches Christians to give in a specific way. Note the words of I Corinthians 16:2-3:\

"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem."

A careful examination of these verses will result in certain truths being apparent.

1. Money was collected on Sunday ("the first day of the week"). We can assume that this money was collected from those attending a regular church service.

2. Money was collected from everyone (“Let every one of you”). Every Christian should take part in the ministry of giving.
3. Money was giving as God prospered. As God blesses us financially, we have a responsibility to return a portion to God.
4. Taking care of the offering once it was collected required thoughtful planning (“whomsoever ye shall approve ... them will I send”). There is a responsibility in the church to be careful with the money that is collected and that responsibility is shouldered by the entire assembly.

Many Christians ask, “HOW much should I give?” In the Old testament the believer was commanded to give 10 percent (Genesis 28:22; Leviticus 27:30). Certainly, this example should be considered worthy of following.

“He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” II Corinthians 9:6-7).

The local church provides great opportunities. We may attend, join, serve, and give. Remember, if you desire Christian growth and security, you need to make church a priority. In many ways you will get out of it what you put into it. How much are you willing to put in?

FROM YOUR READING

1. The Greek word for “church” means to be _____.
_____. How is this significant? _____

2. (True or False) - A “church” is a building _____
3. What did the Old Testament believers need to do in order to be faithful to Temple services? _____

4. List three reasons why church membership is important.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
5. What lessons about giving are found in I Corinthians 16:2-3?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
6. What kind of giver does God love (II Corinthians 9:6-7)? _____

7. What happens to a Christian who does not serve? _____

8. Why is it essential for a Christian to serve? _____

BIBLE STUDY

The following material is given for your personal Bible study and Christian growth. The basic assignments for the course are given and a special “achiever” assignment is suggested for those who desire to go the extra mile. Before you begin, pray that God will allow you to really grow through this endeavor.

SCRIPTURE ASSIGNMENT

As you dig into God’s word this week, you will be faced with truths regarding your responsibilities in the local church. Pray right now that God will help you to be willing to do what His Word commands.

1. What principles about giving do you find in II Corinthians 9:6-8?

2. Read Acts 6:1-7 and answer the following questions:

- a. What caused the Grecians to murmur (v1)? _____
- b. What did the pastoral leadership of the church give themselves to (v4) _____ and _____
- c. The selection process described here refers to the selection of deacons. Who selected these seven men? _____

3. How frequently did the members of the early church meet (Acts 2:46)?

Would you be willing to attend as frequently?

4. What are the two conditions for church membership found in Acts 2:41? They gladly: _____ and were _____.

5. Our attitude about money really shows us where our _____ is (Luke 12:34).
6. Philippians 1:1 is Paul's solution to a local church. What three specific groups of people were present in the local assembly at Philippi?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

NOTE: "Bishop" is another term for Pastor.

Achiever's Question

1. Read Ephesians 4:11-12.
 - a. In addition to the apostles and prophets, whom else did God give to build up the saints in the church? _____
 - b. Verse 12 teaches that the church leaders have a purpose in their ministry. What is that purpose? _____

2. How are Christians in the local assembly to respond to their spiritual leaders (Hebrews 13:17)? _____

Do you feel that this means the saints should be in attendance if the pastor encourages such attendance? _____

MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

Books of the Bible: Review all 39 of the Old Testament books. Be certain that you are able to remember them in order.

Verse: Hebrews 10:25

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Achiever's Verse: I Timothy 3:14-15

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

PRACTICAL ASSIGNMENT

1. Estimate how much money God allowed your household to make last year - \$ _____.
2. Estimate how much money you added to your savings and investments last year - \$ _____.
3. Estimate how much money you gave back to God last year - \$ _____. (If the amounts in number 2 and 3 are less than 10 percent of the estimated amount in number 1, you need to do something about it!)