

The Local Church 1 - Part 3

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the local church as a representation of the universal church, composed of saints, elders, and deacons, and engaged in the Apostles' Doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers.

Duration: 8:31

Scripture: Matthew 18:20, Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 4:11-12, Philippians 1:1, Colossians 3:16, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 Peter 2:9

Topics: "Church Government", "Local Church"

Description

This sermon discusses the wisdom of God in not having denominational headquarters, highlighting how it hinders government control and the spread of error. It emphasizes the importance of local churches being independent and representative of the universal church, composed of saints, elders, and deacons, engaging in activities like the Apostles' Doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. The sermon also stresses that the church is not meant to be an amusement center but a fellowship of forgiven sinners, injecting light and life into a dark world.

Transcript

In not having denominational headquarters, for instance, when an oppressive government comes, like the communist government, and one of the things they want to do is close down the church, well, all they have to do is get hold of the denominational headquarters, isn't that right? If they can control the denominational headquarters, then they control all of the churches in that denomination. And that's been the history. That was a history under Hitler, under communism, and so forth.

Whereas in China today, all through China, probably the healthiest church in the world today is in China, you have these little house groups, you have these little assemblies meeting in homes. They're meeting quietly, they're meeting underground, they're meeting secretly. And you know, the government could never root them out.

Might catch one or two, but that doesn't do it. They can catch one or two, but there's still thousands more meeting that way in China. The wisdom of God in not having denominational headquarters.

And not only does it hinder government control, but it also hinders the spread of error. And this comes right back to our own assembly. Most of the mainline denominations have their own seminaries.

And those seminaries are the ones that provide ministers for their churches. All the forces of liberalism and modernism and apostasy have to do is just seize those seminaries. Sometimes this takes years for them to infiltrate the faculties of these seminaries with modernistic men.

And it's like communism, it's a timeless struggle. But pretty soon, they've taken over the denomination. And once again, we see the wisdom of God in not allowing this to happen, and having the churches independent and not under one rule.

And that brings us to the subject of the local church. You have the universal church, but you also have a local church. And a local church should be a representative, a representation of the universal church.

It should do or say nothing that would deny the truth of the universal church. You say, well now, you said definitions are important. What is the definition of a local church? For instance, what is a meeting of the local church? Well, frankly, it doesn't give a definition in so many words in the New Testament of a local church.

But I'd like to suggest two passages of Scripture to you, which if you take them together, will give you a good definition of a local church. The first is in Philippians chapter 1 and verse 1. Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons. Here you have the composition of a local church.

Saints, bishops, deacons, nothing else. Saints, of course, that means those who have been set apart to God from the world through the new birth. Bishops here are the same as elders.

They're the same as overseers, the same as presbyters. All refer to the same persons, elders. This is different from the current concept in the world.

Today, a bishop in most church circles today is a man who presides over several parishes. Not just one church, for instance, but over several parishes. A bishop, it never means that in the New Testament.

A bishop is an elder and there are always a plurality of elders. There is always a plurality of elders in a local church. Deacons, the word here is ministers, servants, servants of the church.

This is the composition of a local church in the New Testament. Now, just turn to Acts 2.42 and you'll find the activity of a local church. Acts 2.42, you'll find what the local church is engaged in doing.

Acts 2.42, I think it says they continued steadfastly. They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine, fellowship in the breaking of bread and in prayers. The Apostles' Doctrine would be synonymous with the teachings of the apostles, as found in the Word of God today.

Fellowship would mean gathering together as believers and enjoying the company of fellow believers, holding things in common. The breaking of bread, of course, refers to the communion service, the Lord's Supper, and prayers. Now, put that verse together with Philippians 1.1 and you'll find that a local church is an activity made up of saints, elders, deacons who gather together for the Apostles' Doctrine, for fellowship, for breaking of bread, and prayers.

It seems quite simple, doesn't it? That's a definition of an assembly. Somebody else has defined an assembly this way. An assembly is a group of nobodies who gather to exalt somebody.

And somebody is spelt with a capital S. An assembly is a group of nobodies who gather together to exalt somebody. And somebody else has said that an assembly, a New Testament assembly, is a fellowship of forgiven sinners. Very good, isn't it? A fellowship of forgiven sinners.

Let me emphasize here that an assembly is not to be thought of in terms of an amusement center. It was not designed to amuse God's people. To amuse means to think away, doesn't it? Non-think.

A is negative. Muse is think. Non-think.

And, of course, this is the world's activity to amuse people on their way to hell. Listen to what Leighton Ford said. Jesus did not intend his church to provide bigger and better amusement for bigger and more upscale audiences.

His vision was of a church that would inject his light and life into a dark and dying world. So we had better take the vision of Jesus seriously, or we won't just be amusing ourselves to death. We'll be amusing people to hell.

The church is not intended to be an amusement center. The church is not to be run on business principles today. There's been an awful lot of talk in recent years about applying market principles to the church.

And many of the strategies of the world have been transferred into the church.

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