

Faith Pulpit

Why Support the Local Church?

All sorts of religious organizations vie for our support today. While they may not wish to diminish the importance of the local church, they often run the risk of becoming competitive with it as they seek our time, talents and treasures. And in contrast with their glowing reports of what the Lord is doing through them, one's experience with a local church may be disheartening. In such a time of discouragement we often tend to become slack in our attendance, withdraw our financial support and become less involved in its ministry. We are then tempted to treat the local church as we would any other man-made organization.

Do the Scriptures speak to this issue, and, if so, what do they say? I believe the Scriptures teach that the local church is the organization which our Lord has established for the carrying out of His work in this age. That is not to say that there isn't a place for good fundamental educational institutions, mission boards, social agencies, radio and television ministries and a host of other specialized Christian organizations. But their ministries ought to be supportive of the local church, not in competition with it. And they are clearly optional. This contrasts with a divine mandate for believers to be involved in and supportive of the local church. How is this mandate expressed in Scripture, and why should we support it?

I. It is God-ordained.

The earliest mention of the church is found in Matthew chapters 16 and 18. There our Lord tells us He will build His church, and He clearly mandates its importance on the local level in chapter 18:15-20. It is the highest authority in disciplinary matters and the promised place of His presence. In I Corinthians 3, after showing the importance of godly leadership for the church, Paul speaks in verses 9-17 of the local church as "God's building" and as "the temple of God" indwelt by the Spirit of God. He issues a solemn warning to those worldly and divisive local church leaders that "if any man defile the temple of

God, him shall God destroy” (verse 17). Revelation chapter one our Lord appears to John as One standing in the midst of His local churches. And in chapters two and three He sends messages to these churches in which He shows His knowledge of and interest in their internal affairs and leadership. That interest is not casual but intense, as a reading of these messages points out. In them He commends, commands, promises and warns because they belong to Him.

II. It is the Pillar and Ground of the Truth.

This is the phrase used by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:14&15 to describe the local church. He begins the chapter by giving God’s qualifications for local church leadership (pastors—verses 1-7, and deacons—verses 8-13). Then he tells Timothy that he hoped to be able to discuss these things with him personally, but if such a personal visit and discussion should be postponed, he would at least have the standards for local church officers in written form via this letter. The phrase “how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God” refers to observing God’s standards for selecting these local church officers. Paul then speaks of the local church as “the pillar and ground of the truth.” Truth here pictured as a building. Its support and foundation are described as pillars and ground. What happens when a building’s foundation is removed or its pillars taken away? The building collapses. Paul is telling Timothy that the God-ordained way to ensure that the truth of God will be available to future generations, should our Lord tarry, is the presence of spiritually strong and healthy local churches.

III. It Provides the Necessary Things for My Spiritual Growth.

There are many things the local church provides which produce spiritual growth in the believer.

1. *Consistent preaching and teaching from the Bible.* Paul’s command to Timothy (and through him to pastors) is to “preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2). It is within the local church that regular, systematic and faithful exposition of and exhortation from Scripture are to take place.
2. *God-given pastors who shepherd the flock of God.* In Acts 20:28 Paul exhorts the pastors from Ephesus to “take heed... to all the flock... to feed the church of God....” The phrase “to feed” speaks of shepherding, pastoring and tending the flock. This involves both the positive teaching of Bible truth and also the negative warning concerning error, sin, apostasy and compromise. That God has a will and that these pastors are ministering where they are in obedience to that will is seen when Paul urges them to take heed to their flock “... over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers...” (verse 28).
3. *Discipline.* This speaks of instruction as well as action. It is designed to let the believer know when he or she is on the wrong path. Its purpose is not vindictive but corrective. We need the counsel of fellow believers to help us develop perspective and discernment. Such passages as Matthew 18:15-17, I Corinthians 5, and Hebrews 13:17 speak to this matter.
4. *Fellowship and Encouragement.* Whatever our circumstances may be, we need one another’s love, understanding and encouragement. Often we are able to find renewed strength when others realize that we are not the first nor the only ones to experience times of trial and testing.
5. *Regular Observance of the Ordinances.* These are our Lord’s commands to us. In their observance we remember what He has done and renew our vows to Him. As we see new

believers take their public stand for Christ in water baptism we are reminded of that time when we took the same stand and vowed those same vows. In the communion service we remember His death for us and wait for His promised return.

6. *Opportunities to Support Ministries for God Around the World.* As a local church adopts an annual budget, it is committing its members to support the work of God at home through its many agencies and programs, in neighboring places through home missions, and around the world through foreign missions. Such support may include ministries of a general nature or ones which are very specialized. And if a local church has been careful in its planning, it will provide opportunities for supporting missionaries and ministries which cover the globe.
7. *Opportunities for Christian Service.* Financial support does not take the place of active involvement in direct ministry, but the local church which provides opportunities through its varied programs for every believer to be involved in some way in communicating the whole counsel of God. It may be through teaching, music or some other avenue of ministry that the work of God will be enhanced as you put your talents to work for Him.

Since God's Word teaches the importance of the local church to the purposes of God in this age, it deserves the wholehearted support of every believer. How does your practice measure up? We all benefit when it is spiritually strong and healthy; are you a positive factor in the support and ministry of your local church?

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