

WHAT A LOCAL CHURCH NEEDS IN ORDER TO GROW

Introduction

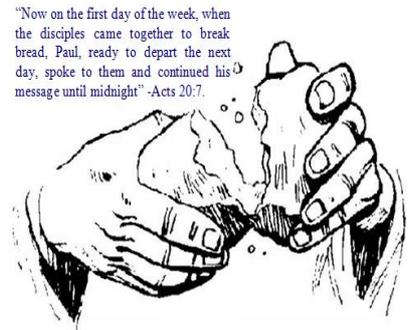
1. There are some churches that are living, growing, and thriving (cp. **Revelation 2:8-11; 3:7-13**), and there are others that are completely dead (cp. **Revelation 3:1-6**). And then there are churches that fall somewhere in between- either growing or dying.
2. In this lesson, I want to focus on the essential things that are necessary in order for a church to fulfil its God-given responsibilities and grow to maturity. Note: this is not meant to be a comprehensive treatise on the subject, but simply a few thoughts that will hopefully provoke you to a further study of this important subject.



I. THE REASONS WE COME TOGETHER AS A CHURCH

A. The members of a local church gather together on various occasions for the following reasons:

1. To partake of the Lord's Supper (**Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:20-34; Acts 20:7**).
2. To sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (**1 Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; cp. 1 Chronicles 16:9; Psalms 30:4**).
3. To offer up prayers, supplications, and intercessions (**1 Timothy 2:1**).
4. To hear the word of God preached and taught (**1 Corinthians 14:26, 29; cp. 1 Timothy 4:6, 11, 13, 16; 5:7, 17; 6:2**).
5. To take up a collection to support needy saints (**1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 1 Timothy 5:3-16**), elders (**1 Timothy 5:17-18**), preachers (**1 Corinthians 9:1-14**), and for the church to be edified (**Ephesians 4:12, 16**).
6. To report on missionary journeys (**Acts 14:27; 15:4**).
7. To exercise love toward one another (**Romans 12:10; 1 Corinthians 12:26; Hebrews 10:24-25**).
8. To pray in times of crisis (**Acts 4:23-31; 12:5, 12**).
9. To deal with urgent matters that threaten the church (**Acts 15:1-29; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5**).
10. To fulfill the evangelistic work of the church; either in supporting preachers in the field (**2 Corinthians 11:7-8; Philippians 4:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8**) or sending out preachers (**Acts 13:1-3**).



HOW AUTHORITY IS ESTABLISHED
Authority is established by...

B. It is important to emphasize here that, all that we do when we come together as a church is not according to the doctrines of men, but by the commandments of the Lord:

1. We must ensure that we have authority for all that we do: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of [i.e. by the authority of] the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (**Colossians 3:17; 2 John 1:9**).
2. We must do all things to glory of God (**1 Corinthians 10:31**).
3. We must ensure that all things are done decently and in order (**1 Corinthians 14:33, 40; cp. Colossians 2:5**).
4. We must do all things with a view to edification (**1 Corinthians 14:26; cp. Romans 14:19; 15:2**).



II. WHAT THE CHURCH NEEDS TO FULFILL ITS RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Having looked at the reasons we come together as a church, we shall now consider what the church needs in order to fulfill these responsibilities:

1. Those that are faithful in their attendance and examples to other brethren (**Philippians 3:17; 1 Timothy 4:12; Hebrews 10:23-25; cp. 1 Corinthians 4:2**).
2. Those qualified to oversee (**1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; cp. Acts 14:23**).
3. Those that are knowledgeable in the scriptures (**Romans 15:14; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:5, 8; cp. 1 Timothy 1:7; 2 Timothy 3:6-7**).
4. Those that are apt to teach (**James 3:1; 1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 2:2, 24; Titus 2:3-5; Hebrews 5:12; cp. Acts 13:1; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11**).
5. Those that are qualified to lead in prayer (**1 Corinthians 14:7-9**).
6. Those capable of leading singing. There is no scripture that speaks of a song leader and yet we all recognize that one is necessarily implied in the command to sing (**Ephesians 5:19**). "In fulfilling the New Testament command to sing, the need for a song leader is unavoidable. In order to have singing in a large body of people, there must be a leader to coordinate all the voices together as one. The responsibility for this falls upon the song leader" (M. Raymer & R. Robins). There will be, no doubt, someone capable (**1 Peter 4:10-11**).
7. Those that are zealous to participate in the work of the church (**2 Corinthians 8:1-4; 9:1-2; Philippians 4:15-16; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8; Titus 2:14; cp. Romans 10:2; 16:1-4, 6, 12**).
8. Those with enough wisdom to make decisions (**1 Corinthians 6:5; James 3:13; cp. James 1:5**).
9. Those that are willing to serve the congregation (**Matthew 20:25-28; Acts 6:1-6; Romans 16:1-2; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Colossians 1:7; 1 Peter 4:10-11**).
10. Those that have proven themselves responsible and reliable (**Luke 16:10; 1 Corinthians 4:2; 2 Corinthians 8:22; Philippians 2:22; 2 Timothy 2:2**).
11. Those that are capable of organizing (**1 Corinthians 12:28; 14:40; Colossians 2:5; Titus 1:5**).
12. Those that are able to provoke others unto love and good works (**Hebrews 10:23-25**).



B. The church needs such men and women to fulfill the greater aims and goals that we must have in view:

1. That we all come to the unity of the faith [the body of truth revealed in the New Testament] and of the knowledge of the Son of God [precise and correct knowledge of who He is and what He says], to a perfect man [complete maturity], to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (**Ephesians 4:13**). Thus, the objective is complete spiritual maturity.
2. That we might be organized (**Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Philippians 1:1**), function (**Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:11-6**), and do the work that God has assigned to the church: edification (**1 Corinthians 14:26**), benevolence (**1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 1 Timothy 5:9-10, 16; cp. Acts 6:1-3**), and to support, defend, maintain, and propagate the truth (**Acts 13:1-3; 2 Corinthians 11:7-8; Philippians 4:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8; 1 Timothy 3:14-15**).
3. That to all those in the spiritual realm might be made known the manifold wisdom of God (**Ephesians 3:8-12**).

III. EVERY MEMBER OF THE BODY IS EXPECTED TO FUNCTION

A. Every member must function for the good of the body:

1. Each member of the body must adopt the right attitude and stir up the zeal toward the work that must be done. Do not think, “They must...” or “We must...” but, “**I** must...”. (i) Each one must have a “mind to work” (**Nehemiah 4:6**), (ii) Each one must put the kingdom of God first (**1 Chronicles 29:3; Matthew 6:33**), and, (iii) Each one must be prepared to participate in the work (**Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-27; Ephesians 4:16; 1 Peter 4:10-11**).
2. Each member must accept the fact that it is God that has ordered his circumstances (**1 Corinthians 7:17**), distributed talents and abilities to each one of us (cp. **1 Corinthians 3:5; 12:11**), which He expects us to use in His service (**Luke 19:11-27; Romans 12:5-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11**), and placed us in the body as He saw fit (**1 Corinthians 12:18**).
3. Discover your talents and abilities - they may only be a seed of potential in you and so you will have to invest time and effort developing them for use in God's kingdom. Examples: (i) Are you in a teaching job? If so, then you can develop your teaching skill and use it to teach your brethren, (ii) Do you have a reasonably good singing voice? If so, then you can practice until you reach a level of excellence that will qualify you to lead the congregation in singing, (iii) Are you good at organizing? If so, you can use that skill to help organize gospel meetings.
4. Each member of the body must contribute toward the work of the body. Unfortunately, there are those that come to services simply to be served and are happy to leave all the planning and work to others. Consider: if everyone followed your example, what would get done? Would there even be a Sunday service?! Each member is expected to function as a part of the body (**Ephesians 4:11-16**). There may be those with seemingly little talent or ability that figure they are of no use as a member of the body, and there may be those with greater talents and abilities that figure they don't count those with little ability as members of the body - These are bad attitudes that must be changed (**1 Corinthians 12:12-25**).

B. It is essential that every member prepares himself for service:

1. Reading and studying. Every Christian ought to be reading and studying the scriptures: Peter says, “Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (**1 Peter 2:1-3**). If we are not devoting time in studying the word of God, then we are not growing. Consider: If we are not studying the scriptures: (i) How can we have genuine faith and conviction (**Romans 10:17; John 20:30-31**)? How can we understand what is the will of God (**Ephesians 5:17**)? How can we be sure we are acting by the authority of Christ (**Colossians 3:17**)? How can we know whether or not we are abiding in the doctrine of Christ (**2 John 1:9**)? How can we be sure our worship is acceptable (e.g., **1 Corinthians 11:17-34**)? How can one be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work (**2 Timothy 3:14-17**)? How can we know all that is necessary for true life and true religion (**2 Peter 2:1-4**)? I hope these examples suffice to prove the point?
2. You must ensure you are a vessel of honor (**2 Timothy 2:21**). Based on the context, Paul is saying that we must purge ourselves by separating from evil associates and everything unholy in our lives. By doing so, we shall be vessels “for honor, sanctified, and useful for the Master, prepared unto every good work” (**1 Corinthians 15:33**; see also **1 John 3:3; 2 Corinthians 7:1**).
3. You must be an example to the believers “in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (**1 Timothy 4:12**). In regards to the meetings (Sunday morning worship, midweek Bible study), this means regular attendance (**Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:24-25**), ensuring one's thoughts are pure in regards to the opposite sex (**2 Corinthians 10:5; 13:12; 1 Timothy 5:2; 2 Timothy 2:22**), having a humble attitude (**Philippians 2:3-8; 1 Peter 5:5**), being friendly (**Proverbs 18:24; Romans 12:10**) and courteous (**1 Peter 3:8**), ensuring one's speech is always edifying (**Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:6**), etc.

IV. LOOKING AT THE CONSEQUENCES

A. The direction in which a church is moving will be decided by the individual members:

1. If every member of the body is functioning as God has so designed, then (i) the church will be moving toward the goal of “unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13), (ii) The church will be organized (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Philippians 1:1), functioning (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:11-6), and doing the work that God has assigned: edification (1 Corinthians 14:26), benevolence (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 1 Timothy 5:9-10, 16; cp. Acts 6:1-3), and to support, defend, maintain, and propagate the truth (Acts 13:1-3; 2 Corinthians 11:7-8; Philippians 4:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 ; 1 Timothy 3:14-15), and, (iii) God will be glorified (Ephesians 3:8-12; 1 Peter 4:11).
2. If there are members of the body that are not functioning as part of the body, then, (i) It could be that certain works are being neglected (1 Corinthians 12:17), (ii) If there are enough inactive members, the Lord may consider the congregation to be dead; even though there are few active members (Revelation 3:1-6), (iii) If all the members are failing to grow (through study and active service), and yet say, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing”, then they are certainly “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked”. To such a church the Lord says, “So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot. I will vomit you of My mouth” (Revelation 3:14-22). In general, in a body that has members that are not growing and functioning, there is bound to be some measure of dysfunction, which will manifest itself in various ways; one can read through 1 Corinthians for examples.
3. There are many negative effects that dysfunctional members have on the body that we could consider, but here are just a few examples: (i) It causes discouragement among other members of the body, (ii) It means that a few members are burdened with all the work, (iii) Visitors may be put off by the hypocrisy.

B. What about those members of the body that are functioning?

1. In order for the church to function as God intends it is necessary for each member to take responsibility for his own faith. Do not look upon others with a critical eye and complain about what others are not doing - God wants *you* to be that for which he has empowered you: He has ordered your circumstances and given you talents and abilities that can be developed and used for the benefit of all the members of the body. Therefore, seek the Lord and prepare yourself for service.
2. Those members of the body that are functioning as God intends ought to do all they can to help and encourage their brethren to prepare themselves in the service of the Lord. This can be done through sermons, Bible classes, and personal conversations.

Conclusion

1. We come together as a church to partake of the Lord’s Supper, sing songs, offer up prayers, hear the word of God, and take up a collection in order to do the work that God has assigned. In order to carry out all these responsibilities, the church needs faithful men and women that are qualified to lead and teach, knowledgeable in the scriptures, and willing to serve the congregation. In fulfilling these responsibilities, we will fulfil the greater aims of complete maturity to the measure and stature of the fullness of Christ.
2. In order for the Lord’s body to function as it ought, each member of the body must fulfil its designed function. Let each one adopt the right attitude toward the work, and develop and use whatever talents and abilities with which the Lord has blessed him. Each one of us must prepare himself by studying the scriptures, making himself a vessel of honor for use by the Lord, and by being an example to all the believers.
3. If every member is functioning as it ought, then God’s purpose for the church is being fulfilled. Those members that are failing to function as they ought are hampering the overall efforts of the body and seeking to thwart God’s purpose for the church.