



The Church - The Communion of Saints

Key idea:

All Christians are called to be part of local churches where they are led and cared for by elders, worship God, learn the Scripture, receive the sacraments, pray together, serve one another, and carry out the Great Commission together.

Key text:

1 Corinthians 1:1-2

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, ² To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ — their Lord and ours.

Acts 14:23

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

Catechism Question 71:

Are Christians only called to be part of the universal Church?

No, all Christians are called to be part of local churches where they are led and cared for by elders, worship God, learn the Scripture, receive the sacraments, pray together, serve one another, and carry out the Great Commission together.

Key points:

1. Every person who is willingly under the Lordship of Christ by embracing the Gospel is in the universal Church. This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion.
2. The universal, invisible Church finds expression in local, visible churches. These churches exist at a particular time and place. They are not spread out geographically but can be identified as a church in a particular location.
3. Local churches are specific communities of believers organized under the leadership of elders.

4. The universal church is all true believers alive today, while the local church is a gathering of local people who profess faith in Christ and live out their Christian calling in community together.
5. The local church is God's primary means of shaping our soul so that we grow in Christlikeness as we live out our Christian calling in community together.

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What part of Sunday's teaching stood out most to you? Why?
2. What is the universal Church? How do I become a member of the universal Church? Can an unbeliever be a member of the universal Church? Why or why not?
3. What is the local church? How do I become a member of a local church? Can an unbeliever ever become a member of a local church? Why or why not?
4. In 1 Corinthians 16:19, Paul mentions both a church that meets in a house and also "the churches in the province of Asia." What is the relationship between various local churches? Is it ok for churches to band together to form a denomination? Why or why not?
5. Why did Paul think it was important to have elders in each local congregation? Why can't believers just meet for fellowship and not organize into congregations or have a leadership structure?
6. Why is being a member of a local church so critical for my spiritual life and sanctification?
7. How is the local church related to the biblical principle of incarnation? What is it about the way God created us as humans that requires the local church and not just the universal Church?
8. What practices would help me grow in my commitment to my local church and help foster the type of close relationships I need to live out my calling as a Christian?
9. Who will I call or see to encourage this week? Who can I encourage to gather with the Church for worship this coming Sunday?