

Theme: 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.

I. Intro - Genie in the Lamp

- A. Disney Aladdin cartoon; Robin Williams as Genie
- B. Phenomenal cosmic power, itty bitty living space
- C. Reminds me of two aspects of the Church - universal & local
- D. What is the universal Church? What is the local church? Why must we understand both?

II. The Universal Church

- A. The universal Church - All those saved by Christ
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:** 1 Corinthians 1:1–2
 - 1. All those everywhere calling on Jesus Christ
 - 2. Every person who is willingly under the Lordship of Christ by embracing the Gospel is in the universal Church
 - 3. At the moment of our conversion we were not only united to Jesus by the Holy Spirit, but we also became members of the universal Church.
 - 4. This is essential because one can become part of a local group of Christians without truly being a Christian, but only true believers are part of the universal Church.

- 5. Much of what we have been focusing on - the Church as the Temple, Body, and Bride of Christ, and as the communion of saints, is mainly focused on the Universal Church.
- 6. The universal Church is the place of phenomenal cosmic power in Genie's phrase!

B. Have I turned to Christ in faith?

- 1. One does not "join" the Universal Church - we are supernaturally joined to it by the Holy Spirit when we are united to Christ by faith
- 2. Have you looked to Christ in faith?
- 3. You were made for Christ, and will never know true peace and rest, or your true purpose and destiny until you do!
You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in You! (Augustine)

Why did God create humans? To glorify and enjoy Him forever!
- 4. I urge you with every fiber of my being - turn from your sin and look to Christ in faith today

III. The Local Church

- A. The local church - believers from the same location who are organized as a particular expression of the universal church
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: 1 Corinthians 1:1–2

1. There is not just a universal Church, but also a church of God in each particular location (Corinth)
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.

The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. 1 Corinthians 16:19

- a. 'churches' - one universal Church comprised of many local churches
 - b. 'church that meets in their home' - an identifiable group of believers who gather together for worship
3. Example: a member of the military or employee of a large, multinational corporation - both have a specific location and job assignment!
 4. The Scripture recognizes both the universal Church and local churches, and it is important that we do so as well.
 5. 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.

B. Distinguishing the universal and local church

1. Local churches are specific communities of believers organized under the leadership of elders
Q71 - "led and cared for by elders"

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. Acts 14:23

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. Titus 1:5

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17

- a. In the NT a local church is always organized with known leaders, particularly elders.
 - b. God leads and directs local churches through appointed elders who "direct the affairs of the church"
 - c. This means that Christians who simply gather for fellowship, bible study, praise, or service are NOT a local church unless they appoint elders, deacons, and other leaders.
 - d. Such gatherings can be a great source of encouragement but they do NOT replace the COMMAND to be part of a local church.
2. 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.
Q71 - 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.
- a. These activities are meant to be carried out in local churches as we live out our Christian calling together.

- b. Although local churches can participate with other local churches & ministries to accomplish these, they must always be rooted within the life of a local church.
3. 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.
- Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Rom 12:15–16
- a. These really require proximity and regular contact
 - b. It is easy to do this with people I will never meet; the call is to do it with those with whom I walk out my Christian faith!

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you **teach and admonish one another with all wisdom**, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. Coloss. 3:16

- a. The wisdom required to teach and admonish one another requires that we actually know each other well enough to do this!
- b. This is speaking of the worship gathering of a local congregation and really can not happen anywhere else!

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24–25

- a. Once again, he speaks of meeting together for worship and encouraging one another.

- b. Once again, we must “consider” how to spur one another on - which requires that we actually know each other!

Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord... ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. James 5:14, 16

- a. Call the elders - a local church where the elders and members know one another
 - b. Confess sins, pray for one another - a local church context
4. The local church is where the doctrine of the Church touches ground, and provides the context for experiencing and living the Christian life.
5. It is easy to prefer the universal Church (phenomenal cosmic power) and be very ambivalent about the local church (itty bitty living space), but this is a huge mistake!

IV. Applying the Word

A. Am I committed to the local church?

1. I have been speaking a lot about unity with the universal church - and that is essential
2. It is great to have relationships with believers from other local churches - give thanks to God for that!
3. But we are called to walk out our Christian life in the context of a specific local church where we are led and cared for by elders, learn the Scripture, worship, receive the sacraments, pray, serve, etc.

4. Our culture is anti-institutional, and many Christians think they don't need to commit to a specific local church, but this is a mistake!
5. Random acts of fellowship do not replace commitment to a local church!
6. The difficulties that arise from a long-term commitment to a local church are one of the main things God wants to use to form and fashion my soul to be more like Jesus!
7. Am I committed to a local church where I know the leaders and they know me?
8. Do I see that except for unusual circumstances (pandemic, personal sickness, extremely remote location) 'virtual church' can not take the place of actually attending a local church?
9. Do my kids (and grandkids) see the importance of commitment to gathering with a local church for worship by my actions - or do they see that other things take priority?
10. In my experience, the faith is rarely "caught" by the next generation apart from a radical commitment to a local church. Nothing else can make up for that lack of commitment, and often the next generation will wander from the faith.
11. I plead with you - always find and be committed to a local church! The 'phenomenal cosmic power' inside you by the Spirit needs to reside in the 'itty bitty living space' of a local church!

B. Communion - With the Lord and one another!

1. In this Sacrament we experience communion with Christ

2. At this Table we also experience communion with one another
3. Paul's warnings in 1 Corinthians 11 are largely about sins against our brothers and sisters in the local church
4. Let us come to the Table as brothers and sisters to Feast on the grace and blessing of God together!

The Church - Universal and Local

1 Corinthians 1:1-2; Acts 14:23

October 11, 2020

Communion

Romans 15:5-6, 33

Teaching keywords: Church; catechism; community; fellowship; leadership

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,⁶ so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...³³ The God of peace be with you all. Amen. Romans 15:5-6, 33

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: 1 Corinthians 1:1-2

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. Acts 14:23