

“God’s Work Today: The Local Church”

Rev. 1:17-20

Purpose:

Your students will come to understand what the Church is in both its universal/invisible and local/visible forms. The lesson follows a dispensational view of the uniqueness of the Church to this age. Students will hear from Scripture their calling to be a part of God’s work today as faithful, baptized, local-church members. The ordinances and the Great Commission are stressed.

In a Nutshell:

With minor exceptions the New Testament is a collection of books written to and for local churches. Even most of the NT books written to individuals were written to give instruction about practice in the local church (1 Tim. 3:14-16). The few NT passages that focus on the family or on the civil state do so as instructions in epistles addressed to local churches. While it is true that the Gospels focus on the person and work of Jesus Christ prior to Pentecost’s establishment of the church, they do so because Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of the local church (Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Cor. 3:9-17). The Gospels are necessary to the ministry of the church the way a foundation is necessary to the raising of a building. Matthew’s Gospel, the one that mentions the church, remembers Jesus’s promise to build His church (16:18) and His promise to meet with local churches in a special way (18:20). Christianity without a local church is not New Testament Christianity. It is a different religion. The Book of Revelation is no exception when it comes to this rule about the centrality of the local church to the Christianity of the New Testament. The book is written to seven local churches (1:11). When it describes what Jesus called “the things which are,” it describes life in those local churches (chs. 2-3). If we want to know what presently “is” God’s work in the world today, we need look no further than the ministry of the local church. Our study of the New Testament doctrine of the local church will include three topics: (1) the relationship of the local church to Israel; (2) the relationship of the local church to believers; and (3) the relationship of the local church to the unbelievers.

To the Testimony!***The relationship of the local church to Israel.***

Matt. 16:13-19 Jud. 21:5 1 Sam. 17:47 1 Chron. 13:2	1. Jesus promised His disciples that He would build His <i>church</i> (Matt. 16:18). The Greek word He used when He did so is <i>ekklesia</i> , which was used in the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) to translate the Hebrew word <i>qahal</i> . Jesus would have been very familiar with OT passages that talk about a <i>qahal</i> . Look up the three of these listed, and see if you can find which English word(s) in them translate the Hebrew word <i>qahal</i> . What do the passages indicate about what Jesus must have had in mind when He promised to build His <i>church</i> ?
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Answer: The words that translate *qahal* in the KJV are *congregation* (Jud. 21:5, 1 Chron. 13:2) and *assembly* (1 Sam. 17:47). The NASB follows this same pattern. The verb form of *qahal* means *to assemble* or *to congregate*. The Greek word *ekklesia* is comprised of a prefix (*ek*) meaning *out* and a verb (*kaleo*) meaning *to call*, so the root meaning of the Greek word *ekklesia* is *to call out*. Robert Saucy explains: “It was a term for the ‘assembly of citizens summoned by the crier, the legislative assembly’” [*The Church in God’s Program* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 12; Saucy is quoting A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, p. 174]. Evidently, it was the calling-out of the crier to assemble that gave the resulting assembly the name *ekklesia*.

What this OT background tells us about what Jesus meant by His *church* is at least twofold: (1) when Jesus said *My church* he had people, not buildings in mind; and (2) when Jesus said *My church* he had in mind people meeting at a specific time and place for a specific purpose – an assembled people, not scattered unassembled individuals.

Application: That Jesus had assembled people in mind when He said *church* is further bolstered by the other time He mentioned the church in Matt. 18:17. Here we find people assembled for a specific purpose at a specific time in a specific place. While it is certainly true that we can speak of “the church universal” in Scripture as meaning all believers of the church age (Matt. 16:18, Eph. 5:23, 25-27, Heb. 12:23), it is also true that the use of the word *church* in even these passages indicates that what is being referred to are people who assemble with others sharing a common purpose. While we certainly should think of the universal church as inclusive of all true believers of the church age, the practical reality of the ministry of the universal church in our day requires us to think of the universal church also as comprised of all true local churches of our age, either everywhere or in a specific geographical region (Acts 15:41, Acts 16:5, Rom. 16:4, 16:16, 1 Cor. 7:17, 11:16, 14:33, 14:34, 16:1, 16:19, 2 Cor. 8:1, 8:18, 8:19, 8:23, 8:24, 11:8, 11:28, 12:13, Gal. 1:2, 1:22, 1 Thess. 2:14, 2 Thess. 1:4, Rev. 1:4, 1:11, 1:20). Churches are at times scattered due to persecution, but when that happens more churches are birthed in the places to which individual Christians have fled (Acts 11:19-26; 13:1).

Nowhere in the NT do we see the pattern so tragically prevalent in our day, in which believers of the church age claim to be a part of the church universal while remaining on the outside of a local church. Biblically, the outside of a local church is the world, not the church universal (1 Cor. 5:9-13). Today, believers remain in the world and call what they are doing membership in the universal church. Any use of the truth of the universal church to escape the truth of the local church is in the end merely a falsehood. When it comes to what is meant by *church* in the NT, two things are necessary – people (not buildings), and assembly for common purpose (not independent isolation). The following chart will help students conceptualize the important differences between the universal and the local church themes in Scripture.

Universal	Local
Militant and triumphant	Militant
Invisible	Visible
The church age—Pentecost to the Rapture	Our present age
A singularity	A plurality
Ideally includes only local-church members	Ideally includes only universal-church members
Abnormally includes non-local-church members	Abnormally includes non-universal-church members

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Matt. 16:18
Acts 11:1-18

2. When Jesus promised to build His church, He used the future tense. In other words, what Jesus intended to do had not yet been done in the days He brought His disciples to Caesarea Philippi. A few years later, Peter finds it necessary to correct the view of members of the local church in Jerusalem who had criticized him for eating with uncircumcised people (Acts 11:1-3). While doing so Peter mentions an event he calls *the beginning* (v. 15). What event does Peter refer to as *the beginning*, and why does he call it that?

Answer: Peter calls the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost *the beginning*. He does so because this is the point at which Jesus began to build His church. John the Baptist had prophesied this beginning of the church, calling it the time at which Jesus baptized His disciples with the Holy Ghost (v. 16). Peter could say that the Gentiles of Cornelius’s household were also part of this newly begun work of God because he could see that they too were similarly baptized when the Holy Ghost fell on them (vv. 15, 17). Peter knew this had happened because the Gentiles spoke in tongues and prophesied (10:44-48). Evidently, they suddenly had the ability to magnify the Lord in fluent Aramaic (v. 46). The baptism was revelation.

Application: Note two applications here. First, it was Jesus who had begun to build His church, or as Peter put it, “what was I, that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:17). Jesus is the God Peter was talking about, and when He decides to build something, not even the gates of hell can withstand it (Matt. 16:18). Second, the sovereignty of Christ over His church should give us solemn pause as believers. Saul of Tarsus found out how difficult it is to kick against the pricks (Acts 26:14). As he persecuted the churches, Jesus said he was guilty of persecuting Him. What we do to the churches, we do to Jesus in an important sense (Matt. 25:33-46). To neglect to care for the people of the churches is to fail to care for Jesus. To reject their gospel is to be forever damned.

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Matt. 16:13-19
Acts 11:5-10
Eph. 2:19-3:12

3. Peter factors prominently into the fulfilment of the Lord’s promise to build His church. He is in some sense foundational to that building as the rock (Matt. 16:18). He also receives the keys of the kingdom, symbols of ultimate authority in this coming church (v. 19). This prominence comes to Peter in the form of an important blessing that Jesus mentions in v. 17. Identify the blessing, and state what this says about the nature of Peter’s special role in Jesus’s new church.

Answer: The blessing is special revelation from heaven. It is not that Jesus promises Peter that he would become the first pope. In fact, He calls Peter “Satan” just a few verses later. No, Jesus promises Peter that he would be the recipient of a new revelation from heaven that would be both the foundation and the ultimate authority in Jesus’s coming church. That role is illustrated for us in the Acts passage, where it was Peter’s reception of a vision from heaven that furthered the founding of the church in an authoritative way. It is the content of Peter’s revelation that is authoritative, not the elevation of Peter’s person or position.

Application: When John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would baptize His disciples with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11), he was prophesying the same event the prophet Joel predicted (Acts 2:16-21), and the same sending of the Comforter as the Spirit of Truth that Jesus had promised (John 14:26, 16:13-15). Joel and Jesus said that this outpouring of the Holy Spirit would be an outpouring of new special revelation. Ultimately, this new revelation to apostles and NT prophets would be written down as Scripture. In this sense, the New Testament is the foundation and ultimate authority for the faith and practice of the church (Eph. 2:19-3:12).

What this means is that the faith and practice of the church is going to be different from the faith and practice of Israel in two important ways, which we can see in play in Acts 11:5-10:

1. Both Jews and Gentiles belong in the same church (v. 3). Church membership is open to every individual believer on the same grounds (Gal. 3:28, Col. 3:11, 1 Tim. 3:14-16). What constitutes the unity of a local church should be its common confession, not its common cultural or generational identity. Whereas Israel was first a natural family and then a nation, a local church is a spiritual brotherhood that can exist in any nation. Biblical local churches are not exclusively “Spanish” or “home” churches.
2. The commandments that define the parameters for the church assembly are brand new because the assembly Jesus had planned was brand new (vv. 3-10). Two commandments that defined the parameters for Israel are mentioned in Acts 11 – circumcision and dietary distinctions between clean foods and unclean foods. Other commandments that made Israel God’s unique assembly include (1) civil laws including civil penalties (capital punishment for sin, farming regulations, military aggression and defense, marital law), (2) regulations related to proper worship (tabernacle/temple furnishings, sacrifices, holy days/the sabbath), (3) stipulations for Israel’s leadership (the offices of prophet, priest, and king; tithing), and (4) identifying markers that set Israel apart from other nations (circumcision, dietary laws, other means of putting a difference between the clean and the unclean). In addition, God’s plan for Israel required civil governance; His plan for the church requires separation from governments and politics.

We must remember, as we think of the ways in which the faith and practice of Israel is different from the faith and practice of the local church, that there are still important ways in which they are similar. Peter mentions this similarity (1 Pet. 2:9). Paul affirms that all Scripture, Old Testament included, is profitable in church ministry for faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16-17). When contemplating the sense in which this is so, understand that Israel applied the Old Testament in at least three ways: (1) assembly application [noted in #2 above], (2) ethical application [the difference between right and wrong (Rom. 7:7, Eph. 6:1-3)], and (3) soteriological application [conviction of sin and pointing to Christ for salvation (Luke 24:44; Gal. 3:23-25)].

For example, take the civil law that told farmers not to harvest the corners of their crops in the nation of Israel (Lev. 19:9-10). There was an assembly application of this law for Israel that no longer applies to the church, because the church is a different assembly. That application stipulated how farmers were supposed to work their fields and vineyards. The previous verse indicates that a civil penalty may have been inflicted upon Israelite farmers who disobeyed this civil law (“that soul shall be cut off from among his people,” v. 8). Farmers in local churches no longer need to apply this law this way, because a local church is not the same kind of assembly as was the nation of Israel.

But this law also had an ethical application. It taught not only the farmers in Israel, but also the merchants and the priests, about the difference between right and wrong. It showed everyone that generosity with the poor and the foreigner is right, and stinginess with them is wrong, whether it was a portion of a field, part of a vineyard, some supplies from your general store, or the extra bed in your home that you had to offer. That ethical application is equally valuable to the local church member today.

Finally, this law tells us what our God is like. It points us to Christ. Verse 10 concludes, “I am the Lord your God.” He told Israel to care for the poor and the stranger, because that represents who He is; it is exactly what He would do. In fact, the care for others expressed by this law contrasts and exposes the natural selfishness we all must see in our own hearts. We have often failed to care for others in need, just as we are quick to notice how others fail to care for our need. Jehovah never failed that way, and I need Him to be saved from my sin. That is the soteriological application of this law that points the NT local church member to Christ in a sanctifying way. It is also the convicting schoolmaster that today brings sinners to repentance.

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The relationship of the local church to believers.

Acts 2:40-41 4. There are a few mathematical terms that are especially important to the account of the early history of Jesus’s church in the book of Acts: *number* (1:15, 4:4, 6:1, 7, 11:21, 16:5); *add* (2:41, 47, 5:14, 11:24); and *multiply* (6:1, 7, 9:31, 12:24). The math begins in 1:15, where Luke tells us that the number of names of disciples was about 120. It begins with a countable list of names. How were people added to this original list of names, ultimately causing churches to multiply (2:40-41)?

Answer: The adding and multiplying begin with witnessing for the gospel (v. 40). When that occurred, some gladly received the gospel (v. 41), meaning that they repented from sin and trusted Jesus Christ for forgiveness (v. 38). Next they were baptized, and finally after baptism

they were added to the local church so that the original number of names counted as about 120 became much larger, in the neighborhood of 3000 now (v. 41). This continued to recur.

Application: As we contemplate the importance of these mathematical terms in the book of Acts, two key aspects of the doctrine of the local church become evident.

First, local church membership is countable. That the history of the church begins with a “number of names” indicates that there was no confusion about the identity of the members of the local church. Members names were known and on a list. Every local church has an inside and an outside, and it needs to know the names of those who are on the inside as opposed to the outside (1 Cor. 5:12). The additions to the local church at Jerusalem were memberships, not casual associations. In fact, because of the nature of the severe discipline of the church members, Ananias and Sapphira, no one was willing to casually associate themselves with this local church (Acts 5:13; where KJV has *join* here, NASB has *associate*; the word is *kollao*, which comes from the noun for *glue* (*kolla*), and it means *to adhere to something as though it were glued on*; here Luke uses it in a way that contrasts his use of *prostithemi* in v. 14, “a large number . . . were added,” which literally means that a large number of believers were *put toward* the original number, hence “added,” not merely “glued on”).

Second, local church membership is comprised of baptized believers. Those who heard Peter first believed, then were baptized, and then were added to the church by the Lord. The unbaptized believer is difficult to find in the New Testament (the thief on the cross is one example, Luke 23:43, although never a church member), as is the unbeliever who is baptized (Rom. 6:1-4). Although it is true that works of righteousness like baptism do not save the sinner (Matt. 3:15, Titus 3:5), as a saved believer’s public identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, baptism is important to local church membership for two reasons:

1. Baptism is the God-designated first observable act of the obedient disciple in his commitment to follow Jesus Christ, which is the fruit that authorizes others to conclude that someone is truly saved (Luke 6:43-45). Peter preached the way he did in Acts 2:38, “Repent and be baptized,” because Jesus had commissioned him to make disciples, “baptizing them” (Matt. 28:19). Baptism is the first truly recognizable step a disciple of Christ makes in his new walk with the Lord. Willingness to confess Christ before men is an important part of true saving faith (Rom. 10:8-9, Matt. 10:32-33). Local churches must withhold judgment about the validity of the unbaptized believers’ willingness to be Christ’s disciple. Therefore, they cannot admit them to membership in an assembly that is by definition comprised of disciples of Christ.
2. Baptism is the first act of public ministry for the disciple of Christ. Jesus launched His public ministry by being baptized. As His disciples, we launch ours in the local church in the same way because we follow His example. It is simply a part of Christlikeness to affirm the need for baptism prior to admission to public ministry for Christ as a member of the local church.

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1 Cor. 11:21-22 Acts 2:42-47 Heb. 10:19-31	5. As Paul writes to correct some of the worship practices of the local church at Corinth, he warns them against despising God's church as he contrasts it with the houses of these believers (1 Cor. 11:21-22). What difference does Paul see between a believer's local church and his house? With the help of the other passages listed, what are some things that a believer can do at church, which he cannot do while staying at home in his house with his family?
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Answer: Paul indicates that the church assembly is for the celebration of the Lord's supper, whereas the houses are places where believers can eat their meals. The implication is that the Lord's supper cannot be properly celebrated at home apart from the local church. This is what is meant in Acts 2:42, when it says that the local church continued in "breaking bread."

Other activities that God has designed to be accomplished in the local church assembly rather than by believers staying home include the following: (1) continuing in the apostles teaching (Acts 2:42), (2) Christian fellowship (Acts 2:42), (3) corporate prayer (Acts 2:42), (4) common exposure to God's mighty deeds (Acts 2:43), (5) a unified budget (Acts 2:44-45), (6) the development of unity of heart (Acts 2:46), (7) corporate praise (Acts 2:47), (8) a corporate testimony (Acts 2:47), (9) corporate worship (Heb. 10:22; "let us"), (10) corporate confession/statement of faith (Heb. 10:23; "let us"), and (11) mutual ministry (Heb. 10:25; "let us"; see also Romans 12). None of these things can be accomplished by believers staying home in their houses, forsaking the assembly of believers in the local church.

Application: The Hebrews 10 passage indicates that staying home rather than assembling with a local church is a very serious sin (vv. 26-31). Notice three things about the seriousness of this sin:

1. This disobedience is especially voluntary or willful (v. 26a). The adverb translated *willingly* is used only one other time in the NT, in 1 Pet. 5:2, where the ministry of pastors must be performed willingly, not under compulsion or for the sake of money. A related adjective is used to describe Philemon, whom Paul hoped would forgive his runaway slave voluntarily and not because he was compelled to by Paul. So what this word says about the disobedience of believers in our passage is that our disobedience against the Lord's will for the assembly is especially voluntary and therefore especially inexcusable. As the redeemed people of God, we are no longer in bondage to sin. We are no longer compelled by that bondage to serve sin. When we do serve sin, we do so voluntarily, in spite of the freedom of our redemption from the bondage of sin (Rom. 6:18-19). To understand this about our disobedience as believers, is to understand what it means to fear the Lord.
2. This disobedience of a believer is especially hopeless (v. 26b). Our author says that, in regard to the believer who voluntarily continues in disobedience, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." I think the key to understanding what that phrase means is to understand something he said about the Sabbath earlier in the book (Heb. 4:1, 4, 6). For the believer, there remains a yet future Sabbath. There was one in the past, and there remains another in the future. But in our passage, the author says, for the believer who voluntarily continues in sin, there does not remain a yet future sacrifice for sins. In other words, the sacrifice for sins already made for him in the past, that of Christ on the cross of Calvary,

which seems to be making no difference in his life given his voluntary sinful disobedience, is the only sacrifice that can make such a difference. There remains no future sacrifice that can do a better job of it. For the unbeliever, there does remain the hope that this sacrifice can still make the difference. But for the disobedient believer, the best sacrifice possible has failed to make the difference, and there is no other sacrifice that can do a better job of making him obey. In that sense, this disobedience of the believer is especially hopeless.

3. This disobedience of a believer is especially tragic (v. 27). Because there is no sacrifice remaining that can change the life of this disobedient believer, there is only one thing left that can – the judgment of a holy God who is a consuming fire in his hatred for sinful disobedience. This is a warning of God’s chastening, similar to Paul’s warning to the Corinthian believers regarding respect for the Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 11:30-32; see Hebrews 12).

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Heb. 10:21 1 Tim. 3:1-15 1 Cor. 3:9-17	6. We get our English word <i>church</i> (<i>kirk</i>) from the German <i>Kirche</i> , which comes from the Greek word for <i>Lord</i> , <i>Kurios</i> . <i>Church</i> means <i>those who belong to the Lord</i> . In the passages listed, those who belong to the Lord are called “the house,” “the building,” “the temple,” or “the household” of God. Do the passages refer to the universal church, the local church, neither, or both, and what do they say about how the church is similar to the house of God in the Old Testament?
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Answer: In so far as the universal church includes not just the church militant, but also the church triumphant, these passages seem to refer more so in context to the local church than they do to the universal church. The author of Hebrews (Luke?) focuses on exhorting believers not to forsake their assembly times (v. 25). That is a specifically local church concern. Paul focuses on instructions for behaviors that were necessary in the local church in the 1 Timothy context (v. 15). The “church of the living God” of that verse is the same church that pastors must be qualified to care for in v. 5, the local church. When Paul writes “*ye* are God’s building,” he is referring to the local church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2).

In the Old Testament, God’s house was the tabernacle and later the temple. This is the comparison Luke (Hebrews) and Paul have in mind in these passages. Jesus is *the High Priest* over the house of God, which is the local church (Heb. 10:21), and Paul explicitly labels the local church of Corinth God’s *temple* (1 Cor. 3:16-17; see also 2 Cor. 6:16, Eph. 2:21). The similarity between the temple and the local church seems to be that just like the temple was the center of biblical Judaism because God’s presence dwelt there in a special way, so also today the local church is the center of biblical Christianity because God’s presence dwells in its assembly in a special way (2 Cor. 6:16, Matt. 18:20).

Application: The way in which the New Testament applies the terms *temple*, *house of God*, *pillar and ground of the truth*, and *church of the living God* to a local church should govern how we

esteem the importance of the local church in our lives as believers. Here are a few applications:

1. The local church is indispensable to biblical Christianity. Dispensing with the local church is willful sin (Heb. 10:26). A Christian who claims he can practice biblical Christianity without local-church membership is a bit like an Israelite trying to claim he could practice biblical Judaism without a temple. God is especially present and active in His house. It is where He wants to be worshipped. In the case of the local church, we can even refer to it as Christ's body. Of course, Jews today are forced into a Judaism with no temple, but today's Judaism is not biblical Judaism. It is a Judaism that has rejected their promised Messiah. The God of the Bible has a new temple today, the local church, and biblical Christianity does not exist in our life without it.
2. The local church is sacred and holy. Destroying the local church is tantamount to an Israelite causing damage of some kind to God's temple in the Old Testament (1 Cor. 3:17). Whether it is apathetic neglect, a divisive party spirit, or active opposition, God has promised to bring destruction on people who contribute to the destruction on a local church.
3. The local church is the key to the believer's reward. In the Old Testament, it was left to Solomon to build God's house. In the New Testament, every believer is assigned the task of building a local church, and we all need to take heed carefully to how we do so (1 Cor. 3:10-15).
4. The local church is the key to the proclamation and preservation of God's truth (1 Tim. 3:15). As the pillar of truth, it is the local church that holds it up high for others to see it. As the ground of the truth, it is the local church that passes it on from one generation to another, unmoved by the vicissitudes of changing times. It is the work of every local church to pass the faith of its fathers unchanged to its sons and daughters.

The relationship of the local church to unbelievers.

Matt. 28:16-20 7. Jesus's great promise was that He would build His church (Matt. 16:18), and it was His Great Commission that told us how He intended to do so (Matt. 28:16-20). In the book of Acts, the number of disciples multiplies (6:1, 7), the word of God multiplies (12:24), and local churches multiply (9:31). Making disciples is what local churches do in the world today. From Matthew's Great Commission passage, why are they to do so, and how are they to do so?

Answer: The *why?* of the Great Commission is answered by the *therefore* of v. 19. We are to make disciples (*teach* in verse 19 is a Greek word that means *make a disciple* [*matheteuo*]; the Greek word for *teach* [*didasko*] is mentioned in v. 20) of the nations because all authority in heaven and in earth has been given to Jesus Christ, making Him worthy of being worshipped, followed, and obeyed. Certainly, the need of poor lost sinners is an important motivation for the local church's Great Commission work and a great source of joy when found (Luke 15:4-6), but it is not the highest motivation, nor the greatest source of joy. The greatest joy is for a lost sinner to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ, intent on worshipping and

obeying Him.

How this is done is laid out for us in simple terms. First, we preach the saving gospel of Christ. No one can be a disciple of Christ unless he is born again. Second, we baptized those who are saved. No one can be a disciple of Christ unless he takes this first step of following the Lord. Finally, we teach those who are baptized to obey the commands of Jesus Christ as faithful church members. The goal is to see a formerly lost person making disciples of the nations as a disciple of Jesus Christ. This is the multiplication of disciples, the word, and churches. It is how Jesus promised to build His church.

Application: Who in your life are you helping become a disciple of Jesus Christ? Clearly, if we are going to be part of this Great Commission work, we first are going to have to become disciples of Christ ourselves. Are we saved? Are we baptized? Are we obeying Jesus's commands as active and growing church members? If so, we are ready to ask the Lord to give us someone to whom we can say, "Follow me while I follow Jesus Christ." You will be used of the Lord to build His church as He promised.

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Interesting Insight!

NBBC article of faith on the local church: "We believe that the universal church is manifest today through the local New Testament church, which is an assembly of baptized believers, bound together by a covenant of faith, worshipping together, teaching the Holy Scriptures, reaching the lost with the gospel, observing the ordinances of Christ, defending the faith and engaging in spiritual fellowship; while exercising the gifts, rights and privileges invested in the local church by His Holy Spirit. The only scriptural offices of spiritual authority in the local church are Pastor and Deacons, whose qualifications and duties are clearly defined in Scripture. We believe that the local church has the absolute right of self-government, directed by the Holy Spirit, and is answerable only to Christ. In all matters of membership, policy, government, discipline, and benevolence, the will of the local church is the final authority. We believe that the local church is the only organization in this age appointed by God to implement His program for the spreading of the Gospel to all the world; that every Christian is bound by Scripture to provide his complete cooperation to the ministry of the local New Testament church (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:29-32)."