



“God’s Work Today: The Local Church”

Rev. 1:17-20

Lesson 11

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 unbelievers.

To The Testimony!

The relationship of the local church to Israel

1. Jesus promised His disciples that He would build His *church* (Matt. 16:18). The Greek word He used when He did so is *ekklēsia*, which was used in the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) to translate the Hebrew word *qahal*. Jesus would have been very familiar with OT passages that talk about a *qahal*. Look up the three of these listed, and see if you can find which English word(s) in them translate the Hebrew word *qahal*. What do the passages
- Matt. 16:13-19
Jud. 21:5
1 Sam. 17:47
1 Chron. 13:2

indicate about what Jesus must have had in mind when He promised to build His *church*?

Important differences between <i>universal</i> and <i>local</i> church	
Universal	Local
Matt. 16:18, Eph. 5:23, 25-27, Heb. 12:23	Acts 15:41, Rom. 16:4, 1 Cor. 7:17, 2 Cor. 8:1, Gal. 1:2, 2 Thess. 1:4
Militant and triumphant	Militant
The church age—Pentecost to the Rapture	Our present age
A singularity	A plurality
Ideally, only local-church members	Ideally, only universal-church members
Abnormally, includes non-local-church members	Abnormally, includes non-universal-church members

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?

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.

The relationship of the local church to the believer

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)?

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?

Heb. 10:21 6. We get our English word *church* (*kirk*) from the German *Kirche*, which comes from the Greek word for *Lord, Kurios*. *Church* means those who belong to the Lord. 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?

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?

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).”