

GOD LOVES THE CHURCH

From Pastor Mark

Happy New Year, IBC! Today and next Sunday, I'll teach on a topic near and dear to my heart—the local church. It's not dear to me because I am a pastor; God led me to be a pastor through showing me His love for the Church. I pray that these messages will help you discover or re-discover the joy and blessing that comes when we fully engage with the people God loves, His Church.

I. GOD'S GOOD PLAN FOR HIS CHURCH.

A. Christ Formed His Church Universal.

1. He Predicted It (Mt. 16:18).
2. He Formed It (1 Cor. 12:13, Acts 1:5 and 11:14-15).
3. He Portrayed It:
 1. His Body (Eph. 1:22-23)
 2. His Family (Eph. 2:19)
 3. His Building (Eph. 2:20-22)
 4. His Flock (Acts 20:28. 1 Peter 5:1-4)
 5. His Bride (Eph. 5:27-32)
 6. Bringing Him Glory (Eph. 3:20-21)

B. Christ Planned the Local Church to Be the Visible Expression of the Universal Church.

1. The Priority of the Local Church
 - a. *Ekklesia* meant “called out assembly, a gathering of people”
 - b. 83% of the uses of *Ekklesia* in the Bible refer to the local church.
2. The Formation of Local Churches
 - a. The First One in Jerusalem (Acts 2:38-42, 4:4, 5:11-12)
 - b. The Following Ones in Judea, Samaria, and Beyond (9:31, Acts 11:30)
 - c. The Fruit Wherever the Gospel Spread (1 Cor. 1:2, Rom. 16:3-5, Epistles, Revelation)
3. The Experience of the Local Church—the way to live out being Christ's Body, Family, Building, Flock, and Bride!

II. GOD'S GOOD PLAN FOR YOUR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

A. The term “church membership” is not used in the Bible. But, all its truth is taught in Scripture.

B. Membership in a local church is how we honor the commitments God expects Christians to make:

1. We need a Body where we belong (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).
2. We need godly leaders who shepherd us and that we gladly follow. (Hebrews 13:7, 13:17; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-3).
3. We need accountability to guard us from sin (Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Cor. 5:11-13).
4. We need a Body where we serve with our gifts (Eph. 4:11-16).
5. We need a People with whom we join in reaching out to those far from God (John 13:34-35, Philippians 2:15-16).

C. Make Your Church Membership a JOY...

Point to Ponder: Biblical Requirements for Membership? What makes Gerri and me a married couple? What makes you and certain other Christians a “church”?

FOR NEXT TIME: Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, *Church Membership*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR JANUARY 8, 2023:

1. Why do many American Christians have difficulty seeing the importance of local churches or of church membership?
2. The “church” is people, not a building. Which of the New Testament pictures of God’s people, the church, are most important to you and why:
 - a. Christ’s Body (Eph.1:22-23)
 - b. His Family (Eph. 2:19)
 - c. His Building (Eph. 2:20-22)
 - d. His Flock (Acts 20:28. 1 Peter 5:1-4)
 - e. His Bride (Eph. 5:27-32)
3. Which of the biblical reasons for church membership in a local church resonate with you the most?
 - a. We need a Body where we belong (1 Cor. 12:12-27).
 - b. We need godly leaders who shepherd us and that we gladly follow. (Heb. 13:7, 13:17; Acts 20:28;1 Peter 5:2-3).
 - c. We need accountability to guard us from sin (Mt. 18:15-17, 1 Cor. 5:11-13).
 - d. We need a Body where we serve with our gifts (Eph. 4:11-16).
 - e. We need a People with whom we join in reaching out to those far from God (John 13:34-35, Philp. 2:15-16).
4. How have the people of IBC been a joy or blessing in your life?
5. What did you learn from this message about God’s view of His Church?
6. What step could you take to more fully engage with your local church?