

Blueprint for the CHURCH



Chris Jones

Forward

I attended a traditional Anglican church as a child and then later in life began attending a Pentecostal church where the old, traditional churches were commonly viewed as being "dead spiritually".

As time went by, the Pentecostal experience started to throw up many questions for me. The doctrine that was being taught did not seem to fit properly when examined in the light of the Word of God.

On top of that, the Sunday services became more and more like a Christian concert where the congregation sat and watched. Participation in singing songs was hard because of the tunes and the words, which so often resembled a Hari Krishna chant more than the Word of God put to music.

People mostly just looked on or entered into different types of swaying or hand motions to try and somehow "enter in". It was all emotion and an appeal to the senses, and it became both boring and frustrating as more and more of the senior pastor's wider family grew into youths and were automatically placed into the "music ministry", creating songs with nonsensical lyrics for the popular Christian music market rather than for congregational edification through singing.

"Living your best life now" messages took over the teaching, and Christian celebrities became more prominent in the pulpit, even though the messages they bought were often far from the Word of God and never about the mystery gospel or the Word rightly divided. All the while, the massive building and the extensive staffing structure required ever more money and the Old Testament tithing law was reinvented, reworked and made to seem like tithing would ensure the tither received an outpouring of ongoing financial blessing far greater than what he tithed.

The mere suggestion that tithing was part of the Mosaic law and wasn't about money, and that we are not under the law in this dispensation of grace, brought a badly concealed type of fury down from the church hierarchy.

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Even the important home Bible studies were centrally vetted by the senior authorities, and the attendees of the church and the home groups seemed to grow weaker and weaker in their understanding of God's Word. Asking questions that were not considered 'proper' was met with disdain and often ridicule.

The line-ups for healing were often large as people were encouraged to walk to the "altar" to get healed, but none were healed despite extraordinary attempts by the pastors, and often the people themselves, to convince everybody that a miraculous healing had occurred.

The Sunday service and Bible study attendance became an exercise in pretence where "Christianese" was spoken and a feigned sense of "I am being blessed by God" became more and more the order of the day.

My first exposure to a different type of church occurred when somehow, I do not remember how, I met an old man in his 80's. In a conversation with him, I found that he was able to answer some of the questions I had, and he only answered directly from His big Bible that he always carried. Those answers were so often easily understood because he always showed the verses I was questioning in the context of the whole passage, and often that context would be an entire chapter or even more.

His name was Ernie Fulton. Nobody regarded him, and few spoke to him.

He invited me to his home one day, and I discovered that he had a regular Bible study group every Wednesday morning, early, and it was my delight to find three other chaps there every Wednesday morning.

His home was old; he even had a wood stove for his cooking, and although very clean and tidy, it was sparsely furnished with very simple but practical furniture. Tea was made from a large kettle on the wood stove. Earnie was always happy or, to be more specific, always appeared to have a wonderful sense of joy and peace.

That little study group answered so many questions simply and logically from the three or four open Bibles around that simple table. There was much discussion but no arguments since there was no place for personal opinions, only God's Word. If a question could not be answered by the Word, it was calmly set aside until we studied it out and brought it back the next week. It was a wonderful and rewarding experience.

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After that, I found it almost impossible to sit and listen to the normal Sunday service in church.

I learned from that experience that truth was not confined to large churches with masses of people and large ministries.

It was through that experience that I began to understand the true meaning of the church assembly and the difference between the church, the Body of Christ and the church, the man-inspired organisation. It was also at that little group that I discovered that the church assembly without the foundation and the truth of God's Word was nothing but a waste of time.

It was there that I began to understand 2 Timothy 2:16-17, relating to false teachers:

But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

And their word will eat as doth a canker:

I still had a long, long way to go in understanding the critical doctrines of the Word of God, but it was there, in Earnie Fulton's house, that I first began to see what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote in Colossians 2:2,

That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;

In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Chris Jones

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Introduction

What is *the* Church? What is *a* church?

The word "Church" is used in the Bible to describe the gathering together of groups of members of Christ's spiritual body, which is made up of every person who has ever, or will ever, believe the gospel of His death, burial, and resurrection.

It's called "The Body of Christ", "The Church", "The New Creation", "The One New Man", where there is no Jew nor Gentile, male or female, slave or free. We're told this in Galatians 3:28.

The church is always the congregating together of these believers, or saints of God, in any particular age.

Throughout history, the people and purpose of the church have changed as God progressively revealed his plans and purposes. Here are some examples of churches the Bible describes:

The Church in the wilderness

The Bible says that Moses was in the 'church in the wilderness' (Acts 7:38). Yet, back in the wilderness, Jesus had not yet died on the cross, nor had he instituted any new covenant, nor had He revealed the revelation of the mystery to Paul!

Moses was part of the group of God's 'chosen people', the nation Israel, which was brought out of Egypt as God's firstborn (Deuteronomy 7:6, Exodus 4:22, Exodus 19:4). This congregation of saints operated mostly out of the Old Mosaic Covenant, and followed God's law to inherit the covenant blessings.

The Church in the Temple

Under the New Testament, there were devout and faithful Jewish believers who preached the gospel of the kingdom and that Jesus was the Son of God. These members of God's church were not under God's Old Covenant, but were subject to God's New Covenant.

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They were participants in the pouring out of God's Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and were supernaturally able to obey the law of God as it was written in their hearts, just as the New Testament promise said in Jeremiah 31:31, Joel 2 and Hebrews 8. Led by Peter, this congregation of saints was preparing to go into the kingdom. The Bible describes this church in Acts 2:44-47,

And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

All this was fully in accordance with prophecy.

The Church, the Body of Christ

For us in this dispensation, when we trust in the gospel and are saved, we are placed into the body of Christ, which is the church (1 Corinthians 12:13, Colossians 1:24).

1 Corinthians 12:27 says this,

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

Within this congregation of saints, Jesus Christ is the head, and we are subject to him (Ephesians 5:23-32). We, who are saved, are each members of the congregation of the saints, the church, the Body of Christ.

You are the church

Members of the church, the Body of Christ, have a special standing distinct from the other churches. We do not go to a temple or a synagogue to worship God because we *are* the temple. 1 Corinthians 3:16 says,

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

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Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders to “feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

The Bible says that he purchased YOU with a price, and that YOU are the temple of the Holy Ghost (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Therefore, the church of God today is found in YOU and ME! Wherever you and I are, the church is. That is why we are to glorify God in our body because God dwells in us (Colossians 1:25, 1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 3:17).

So, in effect, there is a ‘church service’ happening within us 24 hours a day!

Church Groups

Now there are many members of the Body of Christ, the church, today. So when many members of the church get together, that assembly or congregation of saints is also called a church, a local church.

When a group of saints gets together to praise God, study His word, and to build each other up, the Bible calls them a church. For example, Paul writes to the ‘church at Ephesus’, and the ‘church of Galatia’, and the ‘church at Corinth’.

However, each one of us becomes part of **the** church as we are placed into the Body of Christ.

In the Bible, the church is never a building. The congregating together of the saints can happen in a house, a garage, an office building, or a backyard, and the group will still be God’s church.

The church is not bricks and wood, or pews, altars, and baptismal fonts. It has no specific address, and it has no specific name like Catholic or Baptist. Neither does it have a specific day or time to assemble, although, as we’ll see, order and regularity are ideal attributes.

When we assemble, we come together as members of His body, who are joined to Him and to one another by the Spirit. The local church is simply a meeting or assembling together of a group of members of the Body of Christ.

This body, this gathering together, this local church, is made up of imperfect people, so it will always face problems, malfunctions, and disorder, yet this is exactly where the local church should shine the brightest.

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The local church, that man-organised meeting together of the saints, should exist to help imperfect people grow into spiritual maturity through God's Word, sound doctrine, and ministry.

Today this type of assembly is becoming increasingly scarce, and it is hard to find a local church that makes these the priority.

The modern local church is in trouble.

Many, if not most, Christians do not know what the fellowship of the mystery is, which is vital to understand what God is doing today in this dispensation of Grace in which we live.

When local churches do not know and follow the mystery mission described in Ephesians 1-3, they become little more than feel-good social clubs, labouring on self-improvement and positive thinking. Either that or they become bogged down in the law and preach the need to keep the law to either be saved or to keep salvation.

This is completely contrary to the thirteen epistles of Paul, especially Romans, where we can freely receive incredibly deep teaching on the law and grace.

Also, in Ephesians 3:8-9 we are clearly taught,

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast.

When political correctness and relativism define church activity, as they do more and more so today, then churches are not teaching the walk in grace and truth according to Ephesians 4-6 and, most importantly, why we even need grace today, which is because of Romans 3:23,

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Paul's epistles give us the clearest pattern for how a local church should function in this dispensation of grace that we live in today. He teaches what the church is, how it should operate, how leadership should be structured, how doctrine should be preserved, how sin should be confronted, and how believers should grow together in charity and truth.

The Church Is Not A Building

Most people think of the church as the physical structure we meet in. It's holy ground and sacred pews. It's a sanctuary. But Scripture shows that's not so at all. The church is not a building. It's people. When no one's inside the church building, the building's empty, but God's church exists wherever His people are.

Over centuries, hundreds of denominations have appeared, each claiming to be "the church." But the Bible defines the church differently. It is not an organisation or a religious system which we could call "Churchianity." The church belongs to God, and it's spiritual, not physical.

Paul, in 1Timothy3:15, says,

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

He describes the church as "the pillar and ground of the truth." Some take this verse to mean a physical house of God, but Paul is describing a household, a family of believers, not a temple of bricks and wood. The church is made of people who belong to Christ.

In 1Corinthians12:27 we have this,

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

The word ye means all of us together. The church is Christ's body, not a building. 1Corinthians3:16 adds,

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

The Spirit dwells in believers, not in between physical walls or altars.

Colossians1:18 defines the church clearly:

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And he [Christ] is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Christ is the head; we are the members.

Colossians 1:24 repeats this truth where Paul suffers *“for His body’s sake, which is the church.”*

The church, then, is a living body joined to and within Christ, not a physical structure.

The Old Testament used the word "congregation", meaning a gathering of people. You can't have a congregation of bricks. The New Testament word "church" continues that idea—it's a spiritual assembly of believers. Roman Catholics often quote 1 Timothy 3:15 to claim that the church organisation is the pillar of truth, but Paul's letters show that the true church *is* Christ's body, entered by faith, not by any ceremony or membership of an earthly organisation.

We don't join Christ's church by tithing, water baptism, or signing a form. We join when we believe the gospel and at that very point are baptised by the Spirit into His body. That's how we become part of the church—the body of Christ.

Many still confuse the building with the church. They point to signs and say, “There's the Baptist church” or “the Methodist church.” But those are buildings. If we are saved, we are the church. The mystery revealed through Paul is that believers form a new spiritual creature—the body of Christ. We no longer belong to a nation or need a temple with a Holy of Holies. We *are* His temple, His body, His people.

So when someone says, “I'm going to church,” remember: if we belong to Christ, we *are* the church. The building is only where the church meets, and that can be any building or no building at all. The true church is the living body of believers, called saints, joined to Christ the Head, standing as the pillar and ground of the truth.

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We can remove a church building, burn it down, or throw out every pew and Bible, and the real church will not be harmed. The building adds nothing to the true church because the church is not the structure. The church is Jesus Christ and His body, made up of people who believe the gospel and hold to right doctrine. This is why the church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15)—because believers hold the truth in their hearts, not in bricks or furniture. The church is spiritual, working in the minds of people who hear God’s Word and believe it.

Many still think the church is a holy place, like other religions that treat mountains, temples, mosques, or synagogues as sacred. But Christianity under grace has no holy places and no holy objects. Even our printed Bible is holy because of God’s words, not because of the leather and ink. If someone burned every Bible in the building, they would not steal anything sacred from the church, because the church is people—souls placed into Christ by faith in the gospel. You cannot commit sacrilege against the church by damaging physical things.

Our culture often copies other religions by treating certain objects as holy. Some churches call their furniture “the Lord’s table,” as if the wood itself were sacred. But it is only furniture. There is no holy altar, no holy table, no holy room. The church is a spiritual body made of believers. Even the old children’s rhyme—“Here’s the church, here’s the steeple”—teaches the wrong idea. The *people* are the church, not the building.

Many churches reinforce the confusion by putting signs that say “Holy Ground” or by naming their buildings “Baptist Temple,” “Tabernacle,” or “Mount Zion.” These names come from Israel’s system, where God dwelt in a physical tabernacle or on a mountain. But under grace, God dwells in us as 1 Corinthians 3:16 says, “*Ye are the temple of the Holy Ghost.*”

If the Spirit lives in believers, why call a building a temple? The building is not the church. We are.

People pray and sing, “Holy Spirit, fill this place, and, ‘You are welcome here’” as if He enters the room like a mist. But the Spirit already lives in every believer and never leaves. Asking Him to fill a building is asking Him to repeat what He did at Pentecost in Acts 2 or what He did when He filled a person for a particular reason, such as He did to David and many others in the Old Testament. This is not what the Holy Spirit is doing today.

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Asking this is a hopeless mixture of misunderstanding the differences in the Holy Spirit's operations in the past, present and future.

The world sees religion in physical objects, but the church is a spiritual body joined to Christ.

This is why it's very misleading to call a meeting place a "church." The building is not the church; it is simply where the church gathers. We are a fellowship of believers, members of Christ's body. The moment we give spiritual importance to physical things, we leave grace and enter religion. The true church is not a building, a temple, or a mountain. It is the people who belong to Christ.

Many Christians sing songs like "We are standing on Holy Ground", thinking the building they stand in is sacred. But Scripture teaches the opposite. We are not standing on holy ground; we are the church. Believers have been sanctified, justified, and sealed with the Holy Spirit. Holiness is in the *people*, not in the *place*. The emotion of the song is strong, but the doctrine is wrong. If the Spirit lives in us, then we are always in God's presence, not just when we enter a building.

The church is not an earthly institution, corporation, or religious system. It is a spiritual body created by God. Christ is the head, and believers are His members. The church existed long before any nation or denomination. It is heavenly, not earthly. 1 Corinthians 3:16 says believers are the temple of the Holy Ghost. Ephesians 1:13 explains how one joins the church: by hearing the gospel, trusting Christ's death and resurrection, and being sealed with the Holy Spirit. We do not join the church by ceremonies, tithing, or water baptism. Faith alone places us into Christ's body.

Scripture repeatedly shows the church is made of people. A building cannot rest, hear, or be persecuted, yet Acts 9:31 says the churches "had rest," Acts 11:22 speaks of tidings coming "to the ears of the church," and Galatians 1:13 says Paul persecuted the church. Acts 14:27 shows Paul gathering the church together—something you do with people, not structures. The synagogue was a building; the church is a body.

A crude but homely illustration of the relationship the church has with a building is in the fitness enthusiast's relationship to a gym.

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Just as fitness enthusiasts don't confuse the gym building with the fitness community, believers shouldn't confuse the church building with the body of Christ. The gym is only where people gather to work out; the fitness community is the living group of people committed to the same goal. Likewise, the church building is only where believers meet — the true church is the spiritual body of Christ made up of all who believe the gospel.

Because the church is people, the only thing that can be harmed is the mind. 2 Corinthians 11:3 warns that minds can be corrupted from the simplicity in Christ. Buildings, furniture, and objects don't matter. Doctrine is what matters. A strong church is defined by strong minds holding sound teaching, not by size, money, or facilities.

Seeing the church as a building makes faith something we switch on and off —our 'Sunday voice,' our 'church clothes,' our 'church behaviour,' and acting differently at home or work. But if we *are* the church, doctrine must shape our whole life. Wherever we go, we represent Christ.

Covenant theology often pushes national religion and political control, but the body of Christ is not a national institution. It is individuals saved by grace, living out truth in every area of life.

Thinking the church is physical leads to measuring success by numbers, buildings, and influence. But true success is souls saved, believers growing in doctrine, and people giving thanks in all things (1 Thessalonians 5). The church's battle is fought with truth, not laws or political power.

When the church is treated as an earthly system, human hierarchies replace Christ's authority. This is seen in Roman Catholicism, where the Pope is viewed as the church's head. But Colossians 2:19 warns that when believers cling to earthly ordinances—"touch not, taste not, handle not"—they stop "holding the head," who is Christ in heaven. Our nourishment comes from Him, not from holy places or objects.

Since Christ is above, believers must set their affection on things above (Colossians 3:1–2). We live on earth, but our life is hidden with Christ. The church is one spiritual body (Ephesians 1:22–23; Ephesians 4:4). Christ has one body, one head, and one church. Ephesians 5:25 says Christ loved *the* church, not many separate churches.

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All believers are members of this one spiritual body.

Acts 14:27 shows the church being gathered, which only makes sense if the church is made of people, not buildings. Paul's letters confirm this again and again. In Philippians 3:6, he says he persecuted the church. You cannot persecute a building; you persecute people. In Philippians 4:15, Paul says "no church communicated with me." Buildings do not communicate. These verses show clearly that the church is a living body of believers.

So why do people talk about "going to church," "holy ground," or "feeling God's presence in this place", or worse still ", being in the house of the Lord"? These ideas come from Israel's doctrine, where God used temples, altars, and physical places. But building the church today is not building structures. It is helping people grow in the knowledge of the truth.

Ephesians 3:10 says the church—people—makes known the wisdom of God to heavenly places. A building cannot preach or teach. Only believers can. In Acts 11:26, Paul and Barnabas assembled "with the church" and taught many people. The church is the assembly of believers, not the location.

When 2 Corinthians 11:3 warns that minds can be corrupted from the simplicity in Christ, it shows the fragile part of the church. Buildings, money, crowds, and furniture do not matter. What matters is whether believers know the gospel enough to believe it, and to then grow in sound doctrine, and stand fast in the truth they first believed. A strong church is defined by strong minds holding right doctrine.

This is why teaching must engage the mind, not manipulate emotions. Many churches spend time "preparing hearts" with music, but this often clouds right thinking. The assembly should be a place where believers think, question, and learn. This is how the church becomes the pillar and ground of the truth.

When people think the church is a physical organisation, they begin to measure success by size, buildings, and influence. But true success is souls saved, believers growing in doctrine, and people giving thanks in all things (1 Thessalonians 5). The church's battle is fought with truth, not laws or political power.

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If believers think the church is a building or religious system, they create a new authority separate from Christ. This is seen in systems like Roman Catholicism, where the church organisation becomes the authority. But Scripture teaches that Christ is the head of the church, and the church is His body (Ephesians 1:22–23). All nourishment comes from Him, not from holy places or objects.

We cannot “go to church” because we *are* the church. We gather with other members, but the church is always people—those who believe the gospel and hold the truth in their minds.

When we see church as just a building, it changes how we act. We dress differently, speak differently, and behave differently when we “go to church.” But if we *are* the church, then our whole idea of Christian living changes. We are the church when we clean the house and mow the lawn, when we work, when we teach, and when we meet with others. The doctrine God gives us must shape everything we do, not just what happens in a meeting.

The church is people, not a tabernacle, not sacraments, not holy bread or holy baptisms, which means our faith affects every part of our life because we carry the doctrine with us. Paul says in 1 Timothy and Titus 2 that working hard “adorns the doctrine,” because the doctrine lives in us.

When people drift toward national religion—like the Church of England or Roman Catholicism - the institution becomes the authority. But membership in the body of Christ is personal: you and me, and every believer, are members. If people are saved and taught right doctrine, we do not need a national church system. Wherever believers go—into government, work, home—they can say, “I am a Christian first. I am an ambassador. What should I think and do as the church?”

Israel lived daily life outside the temple and visited it for sacrifices. If Christians adopt that pattern, they turn the church into a kingdom-building project. Success becomes physical: big ministries, large crowds, impressive buildings and pastors who can motivate and influence rather than exhort and teach. Pentecostals boast of being the fastest-growing group, but size means nothing if doctrine is wrong. Many people in those numbers have never heard the true gospel. True success is measured by right doctrine, souls saved, believers sanctified, and people learning to give thanks in all things (1 Thessalonians 5).

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If we think the church is a building, our focus becomes earthly—changing laws, gaining influence, seeking happiness, working to get the "right" politicians into power. Then people say, "I tried church; it didn't work for me." Why? Because their life didn't improve. But the true church is not designed to make us happy. It is not even in existence to improve our lifestyle or our "lot in life", contrary to what many pastors believe and teach.

It is designed to save us from sin and equip us for a great spiritual battle. The battle is fought with doctrine, not with buildings, laws, or political power, and the battleground is the mind.

When the church is treated as a physical institution or hierarchy, another authority replaces Christ. This is exactly what Roman Catholicism teaches: the church organisation and the Pope become the authority. But Scripture says *Christ* is the head of the church, and He communicates doctrine to us today through Paul. If you make the church an earthly system, you cut off the true head.

The Pope, the Archbishop, or the senior pastor of an organisation do not speak for Christ. Scripture says Christ Himself is the head of the church, and He has already spoken everything the church needs through His Word. His words are holy because they come from Him. When people turn the church into a physical institution, Colossians 2:19 says they stop "*holding the head.*"

Christ is in heaven, and the church receives nourishment from Him—not from buildings, relics, or holy objects. Displays of Peter's bones or John the Baptist's hand or the shroud of Turin mean nothing when we understand our Head is in heavenly places.

Paul warns in Colossians 2:20–22 that religious systems create rules—"touch not, taste not, handle not"—based on earthly things. These are "rudiments of the world." Food, clothing, money, work, possessions—these are necessary for life, but they are not the substance of our faith. We live on earth, but our Head is above. We operate here as ambassadors, but we think and breathe according to Christ in heaven.

That is why Colossians 3:1–2 commands believers to "seek those things which are above" and to set their affection on heavenly things. This is difficult because we live our whole lives on earth and enjoy earthly pleasures. Yet our life is "hid with Christ in God," and we must ask what the Head wants His body to do. We obey Him as His hands and feet on earth.

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Scripture describes three key characteristics of this body.

First, the church is one. The word “Catholic” originally meant “universal,” and in that sense Scripture teaches one universal church—not the Roman Catholic institution, but the one spiritual body of Christ.

Some reject the idea because of Catholic misuse, but we must not throw away biblical truth. There is one church because Christ has one body.

Ephesians 1:20–23 shows Christ raised and seated at God’s right hand, far above all powers. God *“gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body.”* Christ has one head and one body. Ephesians 4:4 says, *“There is one body, and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”*

We are either in that one body or we are not.

Ephesians 5:23–25 again teaches one church. Christ is the head of *the* church, not *many* churches. As a husband has one wife, Christ has one body. He loved *the* church and gave Himself for it. This one spiritual body is the true church—not buildings, denominations, or earthly institutions.

Ephesians 5:30–32 teaches that believers are *“members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.”*

Just as a husband and wife become *“one flesh,”* Christ and His church form one body under one head. This is a spiritual union, not a physical building. Paul repeats this truth throughout his letters because the Corinthians especially failed to recognise one another as members of the same body.

In 1 Corinthians 10:16–17, Paul reminds them that Christ shed His blood once, and believers share communion in one body. *“We being many are one bread and one body.”*

His point is simple: we cannot reject other believers—they are part of the same body we belong to. There is not “your body” and “their body.” There is one body, and believers must grow in doctrine to live that truth.

1 Corinthians 12:12–13 explains that the body is one, though it has many members.

Just as our physical body has many parts, Christ’s body has many believers. *“By one Spirit are we all baptised into one body.”* Jew and Gentile separations are gone; there is no temple system; there is one Spirit, one faith, one salvation.

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God sets people in the church (1 Corinthians 12:28)—the one spiritual church Christ created. This includes believers who have died, believers who live in every other part of the world, and believers who lack the knowledge to rightly divide the word of Truth (2 Timothy 2: 15) but who know the gospel. All are part of Christ's body.

The church has many members. It is not one person, nor is Christ the church by Himself. Believers are physical members of His body. 1 Corinthians 12:14 says the body is not one member but many. Scripture always uses "members" to describe body parts—hands, feet, eyes—not club membership. So when Paul says believers are "members," he means our actual physical body is part of Christ's body on earth.

This is why 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 says our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Our physical body belongs to Christ. Our hands are His hands; Our feet are His feet. What we do in our body, we do as a member of Christ. This truth holds us accountable: we cannot separate our actions from Christ's body.

Romans 12:4–5 summarises the three aspects of the church. First, "many members in one body." Second, "all members have not the same office"—there is diversity in the body. Third, "we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."

This last point introduces the collective aspect of the church. We are not a lone member; you need other members. When believers gather, they function together as the church.

So the church is:

1. One body under one head, Christ.
2. Many members, each a physical part of Christ's body.
3. Members of one another, needing each other for ministry, growth, and service.

This prepares the way for understanding how the church operates when believers meet, how discipline works, and how the body functions together on earth while its Head remains in heaven.

Blueprint for the Church

When we believe the gospel and trust Christ, we become accountable before God as an individual. Yet the church still operates as a body, and that requires other members. Romans 12:5 says we are “*members one of another*.” This means there is such a thing as a local gathering—not because “local church” is a Bible term, but because the church must assemble for ministry. We cannot call scattered individuals a gathering. When believers come together, that assembly is also called “the church,” and ministry happens there in ways that cannot happen when everyone is separate.

Paul often speaks of “*the church in Thessalonica*,” “*the churches of Galatia*,” or “*the church in their house*.” He is not describing different bodies of Christ, but different groups of believers meeting in different places.

There is one spiritual church, but many gatherings of its members. When believers meet, they can teach, exhort, correct, and strengthen one another—something that's impossible if everyone remains isolated.

Ephesians 4:11–12 explains why God gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers: “*for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*.” These roles existed because believers needed to grow together. Even though supernatural gifts have ceased, the function remains. Verse 14 warns that without this shared ministry, believers become “*children, tossed to and fro*” by false doctrine. Verse 15 says we grow up into Christ by “*speaking the truth in love*.” Verse 16 shows the body “*fitly joined together*,” with every joint supplying what others lack but need. This is why gathering matters: believers strengthen one another.

Ephesians 4:25 says we must speak truth because “*we are members one of another*,” all members together making up one body.

We meet to minister, encourage, and build each other up. If one believer is weak, the whole body suffers. If one grows, others benefit. Ministry is about relationship. Individually we hear the gospel and learn Scripture, but together we edify, comfort, and help each other stand fast.

Romans 16 shows this pattern clearly. Paul mentions “*the church at Cenchrea*,” “*the churches of the Gentiles*,” and “*the church in their house*.” These are groups of saved people meeting wherever they can. The building is irrelevant; the people are the church. Gaius is called “*host of the whole church*,” meaning the believers gathered where he lived. Churches greet and exhort one another because they are all part of the same body under the same head.

Blueprint for the Church

1 Corinthians 14 describes order in the assembly. When *“the whole church be come together into one place”* (v. 23), there must be structure so unbelievers are not confused and believers are edified. Paul rebukes the Corinthians for acting as if they alone possessed God’s word (v. 36). He says, *“Let all things be done decently and in order”* (v. 40). We can be saved, blessed, and secure in Christ without ever gathering—but we cannot fulfil the church’s ministry without other members.

So the church is a body, not a building; a people, not a place; and a mutual ministry, not a religious institution. When believers gather, they function as Christ’s body on earth, strengthening one another and growing together toward the Head.

Why Have Church Meetings?

Why should we meet?

First, to glorify God with our lives.

Second, to understand His will and His Word, studying the Bible rightly divided (2 Timothy 2:15) among people who believe it. Many churches are afraid even to mention “mystery,” “dispensation,” or “rightly divide,” thinking it is too difficult. But Paul says in Ephesians 6 that we should speak boldly about the mystery of the gospel. Meeting together gives us the opportunity to do that.

We learned in the last chapter that the church is not a building. It is a body. The walls, pews, and furniture are not sacred. The church is people—those who believe the gospel and are in Christ. There is only one church, one Lord, one body. All saved people, past and present, are part of that one church. Even believers in other denominations who understand the gospel are part of Christ’s body, though they may not know they’re complete in Him. Many struggle because they are constantly told they must do more to stay saved. This is why grace-based, word-based ministries are needed.

The church is not a museum. We do not gather to look at stained glass, relics, or ancient buildings. Historically, people learned Christianity from pictures because they could not read. Today many visit cathedrals only as tourist sites. But the church is ministry—serving God and serving people according to His will.

Spiritually, the church is one body (1 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:4). Dispensationally, it is the “new creature” of 2 Corinthians 5:17, created by God in contrast to Israel’s covenant nation. No one on earth started the church; God ordained it.

Physically, the church consists of many members—you, me and every believer. We are the only physical part of the church. We have a body, we live on earth, and we interact with others. Our spiritual life—prayer, study, growth—is our personal walk in Christ. We are complete in Him, with no mediator between God and us. Every member has equal access to spiritual blessings and equal responsibility to do God’s will (1 Timothy 2:4).

Blueprint for the Church

So the church is one spiritual body under Christ, made up of many physical members living on earth. We meet not because the building is holy, but because ministry requires people. When believers gather, they strengthen one another, learn together, and carry out the work God gave the church: to make the truth known, to edify one another, and to stand fast in grace.

Our responsibility as members of Christ's body is to see souls saved and saints edified. Rightly dividing the Word of Truth, the Bible, teaches us what the church is, but in this chapter we are focusing on a third biblical use of the word church: not the one spiritual body of Christ, and not the individual believer, but groups of believers gathered together. Scripture shows that ministry happens between members. One member cannot function alone; the body needs all its parts. God never intended isolated Christians serving individually. He intended believers to assemble.

This explains why many churches exist across the world. Wherever members of Christ's body gather, there is a church. A group in Brisbane, Australia, a group in China, Nigeria and even North Korea—each gathering is part of the one body, meeting to minister. Most of Paul's references to "church" describe these assemblies: "the church in Thessalonica," "the churches of Galatia," "the church in their house." These are not separate bodies of Christ but groups of members of the One Body meeting to do ministry that cannot be done alone.

Ephesians 4: 11-12 teaches how this assembly works.

God gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers *"for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."*

These roles existed because believers needed to grow together. Verse 14 warns that without this shared ministry, believers become unstable and are carried about by false doctrine. Verse 15 says we grow up into Christ by *"speaking the truth in love."* Verse 16 shows the whole body *"fitly joined together,"* with every joint supplying what others lack. When believers gather, they strengthen one another and grow toward the Head.

Ephesians 4:25 says we are *"members one of another."* This means we are connected. If one member is weak, the whole body feels it. If one grows, others benefit. Ministry is relationship. We cannot speak truth to our neighbour if our neighbour is never around.

Blueprint for the Church

Gathering is required for mutual edification even though it's not about numbers. It's not about the greater the number, the more powerful the ministry. In fact, huge numbers gathering together is often detrimental to true edification and sound doctrine. A gathering can be two or three.

Modern technology makes the world feel small, but Scripture still teaches the need for physical assembly. The church is not a mediator between Christ and the believer, nor a priestly system dispensing sacraments. Those errors come from misunderstanding the one body and the believer's completeness in Christ. When we know who we are in Christ, we avoid false ideas about local church authority. Yet there remains a ministry that only happens when members gather: encouraging, comforting, teaching, correcting, and helping each other grow.

Ephesians 4:15–16 shows the purpose of meeting: each member brings what God has worked in them, and together the body *“maketh increase... unto the edifying of itself in love.”* Alone, we may grow, but not as strongly as when others help us. And others cannot grow as strongly without us. God ordained the assembly of Christ's members for this reason.

So the church is one spiritual body, made up of many members, and expressed in local gatherings where believers minister to one another. The assembly is not a building or a ritual—it is the living body of Christ working together to see souls saved and saints strengthened.

Today we can communicate through phones, internet, and social media, but something essential is still missing when believers are not physically present with one another.

If all church meetings were simply listening to teaching, people could stay home and watch online, and many already do. But Scripture teaches that gathering provides benefits we cannot receive from the virtual world. Paul presents a doctrine of assembly—members of Christ's body meeting to edify one another in ways impossible through computer screens.

Face-to-face interaction communicates things that emails, texts, or comments never can. Seeing reactions, asking questions, sharing burdens, and encouraging one another requires presence.

Blueprint for the Church

This is why Scripture teaches believers to gather. Though the Bible is two thousand years old and speaks nothing of YouTube or social media, it repeatedly commands assembly.

Technology is helpful, and many learn to rightly divide the Word of truth online, but the goal of doctrinal study is not merely knowledge. It is maturity—growing into Christ so we can help other members of His body. That happens in a local assembly.

If all we ever did was study doctrine, we would become scholars, not ministers. Doctrine must bear fruit. A mature believer sees another member who needs help and provides it. A local assembly makes this possible. Paul asked the Corinthians, *“Where is your care for one another?”*

Knowledge alone is not enough; ministry requires people.

This is what church meetings are for. People need the gospel and basic Bible study. But the long-term purpose is comfort, encouragement, and strength. We meet to endure this present evil world together, to rejoice in God’s promises, and to motivate one another. We cannot do that alone.

The first defining characteristic of a local church is meeting together. If believers don’t gather, they are still part of the one body of Christ and complete in Him, but they miss part of God’s will for the church on earth. God wants assemblies—embassies of His truth—where believers are equipped, trained, encouraged, and strengthened. We cannot edify others if we are alone.

Yes, we can learn, pray, evangelise, and meditate on Scripture by ourselves. But much of God’s will requires other people. Just as we needed Christ to be saved, we need other members to minister to. The Christian life is not only about us; it is about helping others grow.

Meeting together also protects believers from isolation. Many face family or friends who do not believe the gospel, and constant silence hardens them. A local assembly sharpens, encourages, and emboldens believers. It is easier to speak truth when surrounded by people who share our convictions.

Long-distance ministry is real. Paul ministered from a distance, writing letters to churches he had never seen (Colossians 2:5). Yet Paul always said he longed to see them. Being present adds something essential—not mystical, but relational. Ministry is strongest when believers gather, speak truth, and grow together into Christ.

Blueprint for the Church

Colossians 2:5 shows Paul saying he is “with you in spirit,” rejoicing in their order and steadfast faith. But how does he know this? Because Epaphras personally witnessed the Colossian assembly and reported back. Paul could not know their faithfulness simply through letters or distant communication. This illustrates a key truth: We only truly know other members of Christ’s body when we are present with them.

Many believers today learn to study and rightly divide the Word of truth online, and many believe they do not need a local assembly. They say, “I can study alone; I know right doctrine.” But no one knows *them*, no one sees their faith, and no one can testify of their steadfastness. A map of online listeners may show believers everywhere, but without gathering, there is no shared ministry.

Technology—phones, internet and social media- cannot replace the local church. These tools help spread sound doctrine, but, alone, they cannot perform the ministry God designed for the assembly. In earlier centuries, believers met because only one person had a Bible. Later, they met to hear preaching. Today, sermons are online, and everyone owns a Bible. So why meet? Because the assembly is not merely about receiving doctrine. It is about ministering to one another in ways that cannot happen virtually.

1 Corinthians 12:19 asks, *“If they were all one member, where were the body?”*

If the church were just you, it would not be a body. Every member needs the others. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you.” Strong believers need weaker ones to learn how to minister. Weak believers need stronger ones to grow. Older saints need the zeal of the young; younger saints need the wisdom of the old. Every member supplies something the others lack (Ephesians 4:16). Without the assembly, believers become isolated, unchallenged, and unaccountable.

Paul teaches that when believers gather, they learn to evangelise, edify, worship, and glorify God together. Worship is not emotional performance; it is praising God according to His Word. The assembly is a safe place to do this. We do not meet merely to socialise or because of tradition. Personalities may differ, but our unity is Christ and His Word. We meet to build mature members of Christ’s body who can minister to others and help bring new believers into the body.

Blueprint for the Church

God ordained church meetings. A local assembly provides a neutral place where believers can gather, encourage one another, and grow. We cannot fulfil God's will to "see souls saved and saints edified" without other people. Alone, we can learn, pray, and evangelise, but we cannot edify the body. Ministry requires someone else.

Scripture shows churches meeting in houses, schools, and outdoors. The church is never the building—it is people assembling to do God's ministry together. So we do not meet for tradition, guilt, or to "please the pastor." Under grace there is no attendance law. We already have all spiritual blessings in Christ when we learn to rightly divide the Word. But we meet in person to minister to one another, something that cannot happen if believers remain isolated.

1 Thessalonians 2:17 shows Paul longing to see the Thessalonians "*with great desire*." He was absent in body but present in heart, yet he still wanted to be physically with them. Presence matters. Paul wanted to comfort, rejoice, and grow with them. This is why believers gather.

God's will is clear: He wants all men saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). We can obey parts of His will alone—giving thanks, abstaining from sin, studying Scripture—but we cannot edify others if no one is there. Evangelism is harder alone. Growth is slower alone. When we lead someone else to Christ, suddenly there are two members, and ministry becomes possible.

Titus 1:5 shows that God expects order in the church. Paul left Titus in Crete to "*set in order the things that are wanting*" and to "*ordain elders in every city*." Why every city? Because believers gather locally. Travel was limited, so each city needed its own assembly. Today we can travel farther, but the principle remains: God wants local churches—groups of believers meeting to minister.

Many believers around the world have no recognised group teaching sound doctrine near them, so they listen online or read from online ministries, and that helps a great deal, but the goal is that believers eventually grow enough to start a group themselves and it may be just one or two other believers. A local assembly is necessary for full ministry: to grow, to help others grow, and to strengthen one another.

Blueprint for the Church

Paul repeatedly commands believers to greet one another (1 Corinthians 16:20). You cannot do that without meeting. The Corinthian church was divided and selfish; Paul told them to greet one another because they were failing to care for each other. In 2 Corinthians 13:11–12, he says, “*Be of good comfort... live in peace,*” and again commands, “*Greet one another.*” Meeting together is how believers encourage each other, remind each other of their position in Christ, and live out the unity of the body.

When believers do not assemble, these things cannot happen. We cannot comfort one another, rejoice together, or strengthen each other from a distance. We cannot share burdens, correct errors, or motivate one another. We cannot experience the joy of being with like-minded saints who believe the same gospel and who rightly divide the Word.

So we don't meet for tradition, or for socialising, or to impress anyone by showing off what we know or what we possess. We meet because God ordained assemblies of Christ's members. We meet to evangelise, edify, worship, and glorify God together. We meet because every member needs the others. We meet because ministry requires presence. And we meet because the church is a body—not a building—and bodies function only when their members work together.

Paul wrote all his epistles from a distance, proving that ministry can happen through letters and long-distance communication. We still learn from his writings today. Yet even Paul shows that assembly is essential. In 1 Thessalonians 5:26, he commands, “*Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss,*” and instructs that the epistle be read “*unto all the holy brethren.*” That requires believers to gather. Someone had to say, “Everyone from Thessalonica, come together—we're reading Paul's letter.” Teaching can be heard virtually, but learning together, asking questions, and edifying one another cannot happen unless believers meet.

In Colossians 4:16, Paul tells them to read the epistle among themselves and also to the Laodiceans. That requires assemblies in both places. Saved people who know doctrine are told to meet and study together. This is part of the ministry of the church.

The Corinthians understood doctrine but lacked charity and care for one another. Because of that, they did not see the need to meet. 1 Corinthians 12:25–27 teaches that there should be “*no schism in the body,*” meaning no discord or division, and that members should have “*the same care one for another.*”

Blueprint for the Church

If one member suffers, all suffer; if one rejoices, all rejoice. This only works when believers know each other and gather. We cannot share burdens or joys if we never meet.

Paul himself carried *"the care of all the churches"* (2 Corinthians 11:28). He travelled repeatedly to confirm and strengthen assemblies. Romans 12:15 says, *"Weep with them that weep; rejoice with them that rejoice."* That requires presence. 1 Corinthians 13 teaches that charity seeks another's benefit and rejoices in the truth. Where else can believers rejoice in the truth except among other believers? We cannot do that at work, in public, or among unbelieving family. The assembly is where truth is shared, celebrated, and applied.

Charity is the goal of Christian maturity. Rightly dividing the word and growing in the knowledge of God are essential, but without charity they are "nothing." Charity is practised through ministry to others, and that requires gathering. In the assembly, believers learn how to help one another, how to approach situations, how to grow, and how to supply what others lack. This cannot happen in isolation.

Paul gives many reasons to assemble. 1 Corinthians 11:33 shows believers coming together even to eat, demonstrating unity rather than social division. Meeting identifies believers as members of Christ's body and as people committed to making *"all men see the fellowship of the mystery"* (Ephesians 3:9).

We cannot be identified with that purpose by attending churches that do not teach the truth as Jesus Himself revealed to us through Paul.

Here is where the difficulty lies. Few assemblies today teach the Word according to Paul's gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 and Christian growth through Paul's thirteen epistles written to the Body of Christ for today. Because of this, you and I, as believers, may be the only way we can cause the gathering together of like-minded saints in our sphere of influence.

This booklet is about showing how that should happen according to Paul's epistles, Christ's instructions for the church today.

Blueprint for the Church

Paul commands Timothy in 2 Timothy 4 to “*reprove, rebuke, exhort.*” That can only happen in a local assembly? We cannot knock on every believer’s door and rebuke them individually. Correction must happen in an environment where believers gather, study Scripture together, and allow God’s Word to reprove and instruct, not a dictatorial figurehead, but God Himself through His Word rightly divided. Isolation makes this almost impossible.

1 Timothy 5:20 says, “*Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.*”

This requires maturity, love, and a caring assembly. We cannot rebuke strangers; we rebuke people we know and love. A healthy assembly can correct sin without division because members understand the purpose—help, not condemnation.

Galatians 6:1–2 teaches restoration: “*If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one... Bear ye one another’s burdens.*”

Restoration cannot happen unless believers meet regularly, know each other, and care enough to help. This is not “confessing faults” publicly, but mature believers gently correcting those who do not see their error.

Paul often mentions people who laboured with him (Philippians 4:3). They ministered together, not from a distance. In 2 Timothy 1:4, Paul says he longs to see Timothy so he may be “filled with joy.” Seeing other believers grow brings joy. Many of us once struggled to rightly divide the Word of truth, but now we stand firm. That growth is joyful to witness—but it only happens through shared ministry.

Romans 1:11–12 shows Paul wanting to impart a spiritual gift and be comforted by “the mutual faith” of believers. Mutual faith happens when believers assemble, encourage one another, and share what God has taught them.

Assemblies also protect doctrine. 1 Corinthians 5 and Titus 3 show the church identifying false doctrine and removing troublemakers. We cannot “put away” a heretic if there is no assembly to remove them from. If someone is saved, they remain in Christ’s body, but they may not be fit for ministry within a local group.

Assemblies refresh believers. Romans 15:24, 32 shows Paul wanting to visit Rome so he could be “refreshed” by their company. Living as who we are in Christ is hard; living in the flesh is easy. Meeting with like-minded saints strengthens and refreshes us.

Blueprint for the Church

Assemblies also give knowledge we cannot gain from a distance. In Galatians 4, Paul says he wishes he were present because he stands in doubt of them—he needs to see their faces and hear their voices. In Philippians 2:19, Paul sends Timothy so he can *“know your state.”* Letters cannot replace personal presence.

Assemblies adorn the doctrine of God (Titus 2:10). When believers gather faithfully, they display the doctrine of God's grace to the world. People may mock our stand on tithing, baptism, or holy days, but assembling identifies us with truth. 1 Thessalonians 1:7–8 shows the Thessalonians becoming *“ensamples”* to other believers and sounding out the Word of the Lord. A local assembly becomes a testimony both to unbelievers and to believers who need a pattern.

Assemblies promote unity in the faith. Without gathering, everyone studies alone and ends up with isolated beliefs. 1 Corinthians 1:10 calls believers to be *“perfectly joined together in the same mind.”* This does not happen magically—it happens when believers meet, discuss Scripture, and correct each other.

Finally, assemblies allow reproof, rebuke, correction, and instruction (2 Timothy 3:16). We cannot correct ourselves; we always assume we are right. Only other believers can challenge us, sharpen us, and help us grow.

This is why we meet: God ordained assemblies of believers to evangelise, edify, correct, encourage, refresh, and strengthen one another. Without gathering, the body cannot function. With gathering, it grows *“unto the edifying of itself in love.”*

There are things we can only know by being present with other believers. We can hear reports from a distance, but face-to-face fellowship reveals far more. Paul told the Corinthians he had “heard” things about them, but he would know the truth when he saw their faces and whether their words had power. Online ministry never shows the whole person. People present themselves better in writing, and being anonymous online makes people say things they would never say in person. Paul describes this in 2 Corinthians 10: when absent, he could speak boldly, but when present he was humble because he saw real people who needed real help. Presence changes how we relate.

This is another reason believers should assemble.

Blueprint for the Church

Virtual communication cannot replace the ministry that happens when members meet. We are real people living in a real, present evil world, with real needs, burdens, and joys. Only by gathering can we supply what each joint provides (Ephesians 4:16). If we do not practice this “compaction,” the body cannot increase or be edified.

God’s will is that souls be saved and saints edified. Edification requires our participation. It requires us growing individually in the truth, but also meeting with others to encourage, comfort, motivate, and learn. We cannot fulfil the ministry of the body alone.

Ephesians 4:16 shows the whole body *“fitly joined together,”* with every joint supplying something necessary. Each believer brings something no one else can provide—experience, wisdom, comfort, exhortation, correction, or simply presence. Without assembling, these gifts remain unused, and the body does not grow.

Paul repeatedly shows the importance of presence. In 2 Timothy 1:4, he longs to see Timothy so he may be filled with joy. In Romans 1:11–12, he desires to impart a spiritual gift and be comforted by their mutual faith. In Romans 15:24, 32, he wants to visit so he can be refreshed. In Philippians 2:19, he sends Timothy so he can “know your state.” These things cannot be known from a distance.

Assemblies allow believers to rejoice together, weep together, and share burdens (Romans 12:15). They allow restoration (Galatians 6:1–2), correction (2 Timothy 4), and even rebuke when needed (1 Timothy 5:20). These require trust, love, and relationship—things that only develop through regular gathering.

This is why we should meet: God ordained assemblies of believers to evangelise, edify, correct, encourage, refresh, and strengthen one another. Without gathering, the body cannot function. With gathering, it grows *“unto the edifying of itself in love.”*

Marks of a Local Church

What makes up a church?

We have spent the last few chapters showing that a local church is not a building, not a sacred place, and not a religious institution. Biblically, the church is a spiritual body—the one body of Christ. But in this booklet we are not talking about the universal church or our individual life as a member of the body of Christ. We are talking about the gathering of members to do ministry together. That gathering is what we call a local church.

A local church exists because believers who live near each other can meet. Those who are far away cannot. Paul speaks of *“the church at Ephesus,” “the church in Corinth,” “the churches of Galatia,”* because these were groups of saved people assembling to minister.

Ministry between members can only happen when believers meet. If all we did was listen to teaching, we could stay at home and do that, but Scripture shows that the church’s ministry is not just instructional.

Acts 7:38 mentions *“the church in the wilderness,”* referring to Israel’s congregation. That is not our pattern today. Our pattern is Paul. In Philippians 3:17, he says, *“Be followers together of me,”* and to mark those who walk according to his example. Paul went everywhere preaching the gospel and forming assemblies of saved people who could minister to one another. That is what we should do.

Throughout history, people have tried to define the marks of a local church. Some said there is only one mark: preaching the Word. But preaching alone is not an assembly functioning together. We can preach to an empty room or to strangers who never interact, but that’s not necessarily ministry.

Theologians like Calvin and Bullinger said the marks are preaching and administering sacraments—water baptism and the Lord’s Supper. But rightly dividing the Word shows these are not marks of a grace assembly.

We are baptised into Christ by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13), not by water. The Lord’s Supper is not a ritual dispensing grace; it is simply believers eating together in remembrance and fellowship. Grace has no sacred physical objects—no holy water, no holy bread, no holy cup.

Blueprint for the Church

The Belgic Confession, the foundational statement of doctrine of the Reformed churches, added a third mark: church discipline. But even this was tied to sacraments, excommunicating people so they could not partake of the bread. This reflects a kingdom-building mindset, not the truth according to Paul, our apostle for today. Calvin tried to build a religious kingdom in Geneva, just as Rome built its system on earth.

So what truly marks a local church?

Let's look to Paul, not tradition, to see simple, biblical marks of a true local church.

A local church is:

1. A gathering of saved people who understand the gospel of the grace of God.
2. A place where God's Word is taught and rightly divided according to the command in 2 Timothy 2:15, following Paul as the pattern.
3. An assembly where members minister to one another, practising charity, edification, correction, comfort, and mutual faith.

These three marks define a well-functioning assembly of believers who know the grace of God. They avoid the errors of sacramentalism, ritualism, and institutionalism. They reflect Paul's pattern of forming groups of believers, even very small ones, who meet to grow together, serve one another, and make all men see the fellowship of the mystery (Ephesians 3:9).

A local church is not a building, not a ritual centre, not a kingdom institution. It is saved people meeting to do ministry together—the only environment where the body of Christ can function as God intended.

When identifying a true local church, we must use Paul's pattern, not tradition. Many churches claim to be "the church," but Paul warns in 2 Corinthians 11:3–4 that believers can be deceived by "*another Jesus*," "*another spirit*," and "*another gospel*." So we must discern carefully.

A local church is not the universal body of Christ, nor our individual life as a member.

We must always be aware of these definitions and not lose sight of the fact that the universal church is the entire body of believers, dead and alive and those who are yet to be born who will eventually believe the Gospel of Grace.

We are not talking about that here.

Blueprint for the Church

Here we are talking about the gathering of saved people who meet to minister together. Paul speaks of “*the church at Corinth*,” “*the church at Ephesus*,” and “*the churches of Galatia*”—groups of believers in specific places assembling for ministry. Many things God wants done can only happen when believers meet.

Because so much false teaching surrounds the idea of “church,” we need to define it biblically. Historically, people have created long lists of “marks” of a true church—some with one mark, others with twelve or more. But most of these lists are wrong because they mix Israel’s doctrine, kingdom teaching, or sacramental systems with Paul’s instructions.

Mark #1: Understanding the mystery of Christ.

The first essential mark is *understanding the mystery of Christ*.

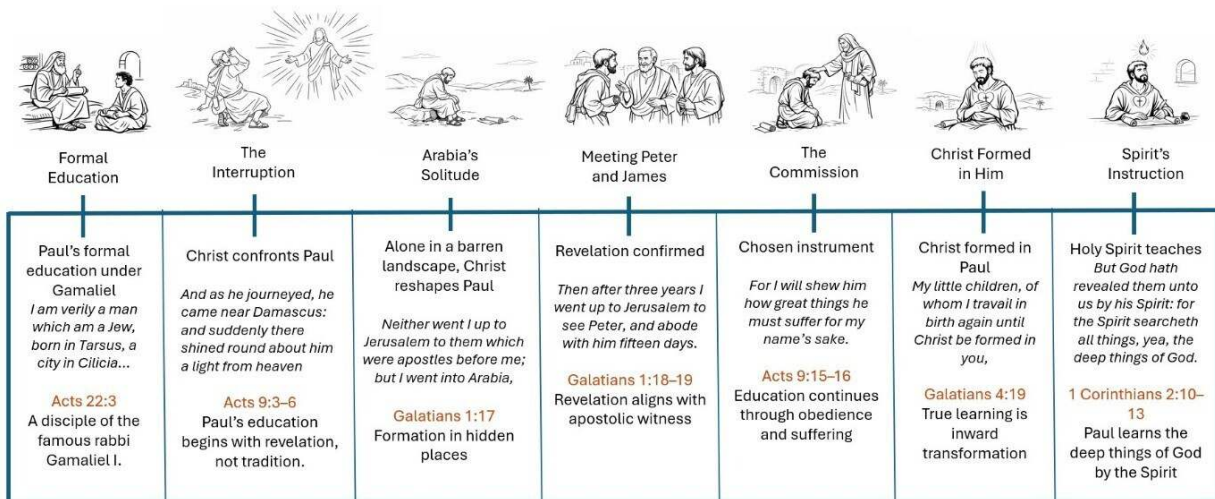
So Mark number 1 of a true local church is a group of saved people who understand the mystery, believe their Bible, and gather to minister to one another according to Paul's doctrine. Anything less indicates an impostor at work.

Paul warns in 2 Corinthians 11:13–14 that there are “*false apostles, deceitful workers*” who transform themselves into ministers of Christ. They preach Christ, but not according to the mystery. They preach Him as a king in prophecy, or as a baby in a manger—yet to know truth we must know Christ according to what He wants us to know *today*, and He revealed that to us through Paul when He saved him miraculously (Acts chapter 9) and personally showed him what his ministry was.

See the chart below to see Paul's education.

Blueprint for the Church

Timeline of Paul's Education



[Press on the image to open a larger version](#)

Salvation comes from Christ's cross and resurrection. Preaching Christ wrongly misdirects people. It sounds like light, but it produces confusion. Many people stop attending church because they hear mixed messages and cannot understand Scripture. A properly functioning assembly must teach God's Word clearly so believers grow.

Paul also says in Romans 16:17 to "avoid" those who teach doctrine contrary to what he taught. This means there are churches teaching doctrine, but not Paul's doctrine.

If a church's leadership does not know the mystery revealed by Christ to Paul for us, they will teach wrong doctrine. We can minister to people who don't understand it, but we cannot place ourselves under leaders who reject it.

Mark #2: Have a Bible and believe it.

Mark #2 of a true local church assembly is that they have a Bible and they believe it.

Christ is our head, and salvation comes only by trusting Him. A person can hear the gospel, believe it, and be saved without ever owning a Bible. But ministry requires Scripture.

To grow, to judge doctrine, and to hold teachers accountable, believers need a final authority. You cannot trust me or any other person as the authority—I am just another member of the body. Christ communicates to His church through His written Word.

Paul makes this clear.

In 1 Timothy 6:3, he calls his own teachings *“the words of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* In 1 Corinthians 14:37, he says,

If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

What he writes are “the commandments of the Lord.”

So Jesus speaks to the church today through Paul’s epistles, not through mystical experiences or private revelations.

Red-letter Bibles can mislead people into thinking Jesus only spoke in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But **all** Scripture is inspired (2 Timothy 3:16), and Christ gave doctrine to Paul for the church.

Rightly dividing the Word does not cut out the rest of the Bible. We need **all** Scripture. Paul constantly quotes the law and prophets. The law teaches the knowledge of sin so people understand their need for Christ. Today, many do not even know what sin is because they do not know Scripture, because they have never been taught properly. Whether people believe it or not, Scripture defines sin.

Faith itself comes from Scripture.

Romans 10:17 says,

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Without the Word, there is no faith.

Blueprint for the Church

Churches that try to operate on “experiencing Christ” instead of Scripture fall into error. A popular example is the book “Jesus Calling”, where the author claims Jesus speaks to her daily because the Bible is “not enough.” That is just plain heresy. God does not give new revelation. If someone writes words and claims Jesus said them, they are speaking falsely.

This is why we need a Bible we can trust.

The Bible translation issue matters because God promised to preserve His Word. If Scripture is inspired but only perfect in the originals—which no one has—then we are left with an imperfect Bible. That destroys final authority. Yet Jesus and the apostles always treated Scripture as fully trustworthy. We must do the same.

We teach the King James Bible because it has a sound textual foundation and reflects God’s preserved words in English. Believers need a Bible they can read, believe, and submit to. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 says the Word works effectually in those who believe it. But if people think they can change any verse by appealing to the Greek or Hebrew whenever they dislike what it says, they never truly believe Scripture. They treat the Bible as adjustable rather than the only and final authority of truth.

A properly functioning assembly must have a Bible and believe it. Without that, Christ cannot direct His church, faith cannot grow, doctrine cannot be tested, and ministry cannot operate. Scripture is both the church’s foundation and its lifeline, and every member needs it in their hands.

Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 that the Thessalonians received “*the word of God which ye heard of us.*” God’s Word is not mystical feelings or vague impressions or the pseudo-doctrine sprouted by people who seldom pick up a Bible and certainly do not know the critical importance of Paul’s writings. That is fairies down the bottom of the garden stuff.

God’s Word is spoken, written words that can be heard, read, checked out and understood. The Thessalonians heard Paul’s words and recognised them as God’s words. When God speaks, we do not change what He says. We keep His words as they are and we change accordingly. God’s Word is not up for debate. It is there for us to believe as it stands, and when we know God personally inspired and preserved it, we can more easily accept it as final authority. Sadly, this does not apply to many who claim to teach the Word today.

Blueprint for the Church

We teach the King James Bible as God's preserved Word, but we do not make Bible translation our main issue. Still, it is a major problem in our culture. Many people reject the gospel because they do not trust the Bible. Atheists attack Scripture first. Muslims say Christianity is false because there are "many Bibles." The real issue is final authority. Why do you believe the Bible is God's Word?

Paul says the Word "*effectually works also in you that believe.*" Whatever translation someone uses, the key is to believe the words—not just hold up a book and call it God's Word, but trust the actual words on the page.

When we refuse to change God's words, they begin to change us. That is how Scripture works. We unravel the Word of God piece by piece while never losing sight of the overall, entire message.

Modern Bible translations are constantly changing. No one holds up an NIV or ESV and says, "These words are perfect," because they know another edition is coming. A believer must settle the issue: trust every word in the Bible we use. When we do, Scripture will work effectually in us.

When pastors switch Bible versions to fit their sermon points, they teach people not to trust Scripture. There is confusion when everyone has different Bibles and the verses don't match. No one knows which words were correct. A church should persuade people to trust the Bible, not doubt it. Sadly, many people inside church assemblies lose confidence in Scripture because of this confusion.

False marks of a church abound. The Catholic Church claims four marks: one, holy, catholic, apostolic—meaning one institution under Rome, teaching works, universal in scope, and tracing authority to Peter. This is not the doctrine that the apostle to the church today, Paul, teaches.

Evangelical groups create their own lists. Mark Dever's "Nine Marks" include discipleship, leadership, and evangelism, but also sacraments. J.M. Carroll's Trail of Blood produced Landmark Baptists who claim only Baptist churches are the bride of Christ. These systems confuse the body of Christ with earthly institutions and man-devised doctrine that rejects the sound doctrine of the Word.

Blueprint for the Church

Paul warns that assemblies can be corrupted by subtle error.

It is easy to slip into kingdom thinking that the church is responsible for building the kingdom on earth today—imagining the church as a building, corporation, or earthly institution. But we are ambassadors of a spiritual body, not builders of a physical kingdom.

So when someone says, “We are a church,” we must ask: Which Jesus? Which gospel? Which spirit? Do they preach Christ according to the mystery? Do they teach grace without law? Do they believe the Bible? Without these marks, they may call themselves a church, but they are not following Paul’s pattern.

Mark #3: Rightly Divide the Bible

Mark #3 of a true local church assembly is that they rightly divide the Word of Truth, the Bible.

Having a Bible is essential, but understanding it requires rightly dividing it. 2 Timothy 2:15-16 commands us to *“rightly divide the word of truth”* and to *“shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.”*

Rightly dividing the Word of truth removes confusion and helps us see what God is doing, to whom, and when. God speaks to us through the entire Bible; rightly dividing it helps us understand His will for us today so He can work through us.

Without rightly dividing the Word, people pray for things God is not doing today—like healing their land (2 Chronicles 7:14) or sending a flood. God will not do these things today. Rightly dividing the Word aligns us with God’s revealed will for us in this present age.

God’s will for the church was revealed through Paul.

Ephesians 3:1–2 says the dispensation of grace was given to Paul for the Gentiles. 1 Corinthians 3:10 calls Paul the “master builder,” laying the foundation of Christ according to the mystery. Ephesians 3:4 says the mystery was revealed to Paul by the Spirit. God is not working in “mysterious ways” today. He has revealed the mystery and His will to us plainly - in Scripture.

If a church follows Pentecost instead of Paul, it will seek tongues, healings, and kingdom signs. It will measure success by size, like the Roman Catholic Church, which sees itself as God's kingdom on earth. This is kingdom doctrine, not Paul's doctrine.

A local church must be a place where believers learn to be stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1). Without the now revealed mystery, believers fail to understand God's will, risk misunderstanding the gospel, and cannot function properly as a church. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth—Christ according to the mystery, Scripture rightly divided.

Mark #4: Work

Mark #4 of a true local church is that they work.

A functioning assembly built on Paul's epistles does not exist for spectators. It is not a place where people sit, watch, and leave. A church must do the work God gave it. 2 Corinthians 5:18 says we minister the gospel of reconciliation. 1 Timothy 2:4 says God's will is for all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Ephesians 3:9 says we make all men see the fellowship of the mystery. 1 Thessalonians 5 tells us to pray without ceasing and be thankful. These duties are easier when believers meet and equip one another.

This means a church is not a community centre.

Many churches today try to provide recreation, entertainment, and social programs. But that is not the purpose of a Paul-inspired assembly. We are not a concert hall. Turning off the lights, making a smoke haze, putting a band on stage, and creating a performance makes ministry impossible. People cannot minister to each other when they cannot even see each other. Clapping for a performance misunderstands the nature of church. We gather to be equipped, not entertained.

Church assembly is not a show. It is not a place where a few people perform while everyone else watches or listens. Ministry is personal. Every member should learn to work. Some are not ready yet—they need teaching and growth—but the goal is that all saints become workers. Grace does not mean we do nothing. We do not work for salvation, but we work *because* we are saved.

Mark #5: Pursues Purity

Mark #5 of a true church assembly is that it pursues purity.

This is where people accuse churchgoers of hypocrisy. But Scripture teaches that when saints gather, the environment should be different from the world. Christ is our head. He is holy. He calls us to holiness. We do not always live holy lives—we struggle with the flesh daily—but when we assemble, we encourage one another toward purity.

We should abhor evil. Yet in our flesh, we sometimes enjoy things God calls evil. That is exactly why we need each other. Alone, it is hard to pursue holiness. Together, we remind one another of who we are in Christ and what God desires. The church should be a place where purity is valued, encouraged, and pursued—not because we are perfect, but because Christ is.

The world calls us hypocrites, and in one sense they are right. We are not perfectly pure. But we gather because we know God saved us by grace and wants us to grow. A local church should be the place where believers press toward holiness, worship God in their lives through His Word, and help each other walk worthy of their calling.

So a true local church assembly works and pursues purity. It is not entertainment, not recreation, not a social club. It is a gathering of saved people who meet to do God's will, encourage one another, and grow together into Christ.

Paul says he counted all things but dung so he could win Christ, and a church should encourage one another toward that same goal. When we leave the assembly, there are things in life we will not count as dung—but when we gather, our direction should be holiness.

Some call this “legalism,” but pursuing purity is simply obeying God. Evangelicals often criticise fundamentalists for this, yet every church should pursue purity. “Come as you are” may work for evangelism, but it is not the purpose of the assembly. Here, we should be pulling each other upward—motivating one another to serve the Lord more faithfully. We should not come as we are and leave unchanged. Growth requires challenge, not comfort.

Blueprint for the Church

Churches fear people won't attend if holiness is expected, but God never intended the local church to be a comfort zone. We are training together—like a gym. Growth requires effort, not relaxation. So we avoid worldly traditions like holy days or other popular customs. Why? The answer is purity. Christ was not born on December 25, and He never told us to honour His birthday. Tradition belongs out there in a world that does not believe the Gospel of the Grace of God; purity belongs in the local church assembly of the Body of Christ.

This is sanctification. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says, *“This is the will of God, even your sanctification.”*

Sanctification means being set apart for God's purpose. The assembly should be a place where, despite the corruption of the world and the struggles in our families, we come together to pursue God's will. 1 Thessalonians 5:22 says to abstain from all appearance of evil. Pursuing purity means separating from the world's ways.

The church is not a mixed gathering of believers and unbelievers. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. This applies to the assembly. Unbelievers may visit, but they do not shape our direction. They should feel the weight of the gospel, not be comforted in their unbelief. Modern churches try to make services attractive to unbelievers, atheists and sceptics, but unbelievers cannot help define what the church is. The assembly is for saints to grow, learn, and serve.

Mark #6: Proper Order.

Mark #6 of a true church assembly is that it has proper order.

Paul rejoiced when he saw the Colossians' *“order”* (Colossians 2:5). A local church must recognise God's order—whether in the home, in society (Romans 13:1), or in the assembly (Titus 1:5). Paul left Titus in Crete to *“set in order”* the things that were lacking and to ordain elders. A church cannot function in chaos. There must be structure, so believers know how to behave in the assembly.

Blueprint for the Church

The Corinthians lacked this. They understood grace but not the responsibilities of a local church, so they lacked charity and order. Paul told them to *“keep the ordinances”* (1 Corinthians 11:2). Ordinances are not sacraments or the Mosaic law; they are practices that maintain order—like local ordinances in a city. They keep the assembly functioning properly and in correct order.

A true Paul-based church assembly presses toward purity and maintains proper order so believers can grow together into Christ.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:3, explains God’s headship structure: Christ is the head of every person, the husband is the head of the wife, and God is the head of Christ. This teaches submission and leadership within God’s design. All believers submit to Christ, yet there are roles in the church and home that maintain order.

Paul says, *“Let all things be done decently and in order”* (1 Corinthians 14:40). 1 Timothy 3:4–5 shows that a bishop must rule his own house well, because if he cannot manage his home, he cannot care for the church of God.

A bishop here is simply a Christian of mature experience and understanding who assists in exercising godly care over the spiritual life of a local fellowship. He does not rule by lording it over the saints, but rather he leads by his spiritual example.

These verses in 1 Timothy 3 only make sense when we understand that Paul is speaking about a local assembly, not the one spiritual body of Christ.

In Christ, all believers are equal, but in the local church God has established roles for the sake of order—just as in a family.

Mark #7: Edification

Mark #7 of a true local church is that they edify one another.

Edification is not one man teaching while everyone else listens. It is the whole body building itself up. Ephesians 4:16 says every joint supplies something so the body can increase. Edification includes rebuke, reproof, restoration, comfort, instruction, and encouragement. It is personal ministry.

Blueprint for the Church

Modern churches often treat the pastor as the only counsellor. Seminaries train pastors to handle all manner of problems, but Paul's pattern is different. The body counsels itself. Believers who know God's Word and know each other can help far better than a distant pastor. The best counsel for someone often comes from someone near who knows their life and is grounded in Scripture.

Parents and children counsel each other. Families help each other grow. Believers who understand rightly dividing the Word can help confused Christians who are struggling. This is the ministry of the body. Every member should be equipped to comfort, warn, restore, and encourage.

1 Corinthians 14 shows that spiritual gifts were useless unless they edified others. Paul told them to desire prophecy because it helped the church. 2 Timothy 4:2 shows edification sometimes requires tearing down before building up—*“reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”*

Galatians 6:1–2 describes restoring those overtaken in a fault. This is the work of spiritual believers, not just pastors.

Paul also says to comfort the afflicted, support the weak, and warn the unruly. Romans 14:1 says to receive the weak in the faith. The church is not a place where only strong believers gather; it is where the weak are helped and taught. It is not a self-help pep talk. It is a place where believers honestly say, “I need to grow. I long for the true knowledge of God,” and where correction is welcomed.

A true local church is a gathering where believers pursue purity, maintain God's order, and edify one another—building each other up in doctrine, charity, and faithful living.

Holding the Head

We have been studying the local church assembly—not the whole body of Christ, and not our individual walk, but the gathering of saints together in one place.

When saved people meet together in the same physical location to minister, that is a local church. Technology allows others to listen from afar, but there are things you can only do in person, such as learn about each other, serve each other, and practice the ministry God gave us. This is why Paul established local churches. It is a doctrine of Paul, our apostle to the Body of Christ today, not a tradition.

The teaching of rightly dividing the Word of Truth, the mystery, the understanding of God's dispensations, especially the Dispensation of Grace we live in today, all help us to know Christ correctly, to serve Him faithfully, and be ready to stand before Him blameless.

In this chapter we are going to look at what it means to hold our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the local assembly.

In Colossians 2:18-19 we are told,

Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

Christ is the head of the entire body of Christ. All saved people in this dispensation belong to that one body. But in our present life, we gather as a local expression of that body. We meet to grow, minister, and serve the Lord together. So we should understand what it means to hold Christ as our head in the local church assembly.

In the next chapter we will study positions and authority—elders, bishops and deacons and that can sound like a religious hierarchy if we do not first understand Christ's headship. If we forget the Head, it becomes easy for leaders to lord over people. But when Christ is held as the Head, authority in the church is simply a way to carry out *His* will, not man's.

Blueprint for the Church

Ephesians 4:5 says there is one Lord. The local church has no pope, no earthly vicar, no CEO. The pastor is not the head. Christ alone is Lord of the assembly. He is not physically present, but He rules through His Word. We gather as His body, and He directs us through Scripture.

We preach the dispensation of grace and the mystery of Christ because they come from Him. We preach Christ crucified. We stand in the liberty He gave us (Galatians 5:1). We are not under the law, nor under religious systems, nor under holy places. The church is not a building—it is a body. But liberty does not mean we have no orders. Grace does not mean we live however we want.

1 Thessalonians 4:2 says Paul gave “commandments... by the Lord Jesus.” These are not the 613 laws of Israel, but they are real commands just the same. We have a Lord, and we have orders. We will give account to Him (Romans 14:12). Grace frees us from sin, but it also makes us servants of Christ.

Our culture resists submission. People resist authority in marriage, work, education, and government. But every saint is a servant. Biblical submission is essential for understanding marriage and the local church. Everyone in the assembly submits to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Head. We are saved by grace, but we are saved to serve. We gather because our Lord has given us work to do.

Romans 6:18 says we are “*made free from sin*” and have become “*servants of righteousness*”. Grace gives liberty, but not liberty to live for ourselves. Our righteousness is Christ’s (Romans 10:3). Paul repeatedly calls himself a “*servant of Jesus Christ*,” not only as an apostle but as one saved by the Lord and obligated to serve Him. Every believer shares this duty.

Romans 14:7–8 teaches that none of us lives or dies to ourselves. We live unto the Lord and die unto the Lord. Whether living or dying, “we are the Lord’s.” Paul then speaks of our accountability before Christ.

So in defining the local church, we must remember that Christ is our Head and must be respected as such. It is easy to forget this when we think of Jesus only in the past—His earthly life, His death, His resurrection. But He is Lord today, and He has given us responsibilities. Everything we do should be done for His glory.

Blueprint for the Church

The word Lord in Paul's epistles is not a religious title. It means Master—one with authority, one who commands. In history, a “lord” owned the land and the people living on it served him. That idea of submission is largely lost in modern culture, but Scripture restores it. In the local church, Christ is not only each believer's Head individually; He is the Head of the assembly. We gather as His servants, obeying His will together.

This is why “Lordship Salvation” is wrong.

Christ is Lord whether or not someone lives perfectly for Him. A believer may fail to serve and be ashamed at the judgment seat, but Christ remains Lord. Or a believer may serve faithfully and receive reward. His lordship does not depend on our performance. He is Lord because He is the resurrected Christ.

Colossians 1:14–19 describes His supremacy. Through His blood we have redemption. He is the image of the invisible God. He is the firstborn from the dead. He created all things—heavenly and earthly, visible and invisible. He existed before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is *“the head of the body, the church,”* so that *“in all things He has preeminence”*. This includes the local assembly. No elder, bishop, pastor, or board can take His place. We answer to Christ alone.

Because Christ is our Head, everything we do must be done unto Him. Colossians 3:23–24 says, *“Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men... for ye serve the Lord Christ.”*

Ministry is not for human praise or temporary benefit. It is eternal work done for Christ. Whether in our homes, careers, finances, or time, we serve Him. He is our Master, and we will receive reward from Him.

So the local church must always hold Christ as its Head. He is Lord of creation, Lord of resurrection, Lord of the body, and Lord of the assembly. Everything we do together must be done under His authority and for His glory; whether at home, at work, or in the assembly of the local church, everything is ultimately unto the Lord, not unto men.

We may think we run our home for our spouse and children, or work for our boss, or attend church because of the pastor. But Colossians 3:23–24 says plainly that whatever we do, we do it *“heartily, as to the Lord... for ye serve the Lord Christ.”*

Blueprint for the Church

He is the One who sees, knows, commands, and rewards. Human leaders can only reward temporarily; Christ rewards eternally.

Paul shows this by grounding every instruction in Christ's authority. Wives submit to husbands *"as it is fit in the Lord."* Husbands love their wives because they serve the Lord. Children obey their parents because it is *"well pleasing unto the Lord."* Servants obey masters *"not as men-pleasers, but fearing God"*. The motivation for all Christian duty is Christ's lordship. He saved us, gave us grace, gave us life, and is preeminent over all things. Why wouldn't we serve Him?

So the local church must always hold Christ as its Head. He is Lord of creation, Lord of resurrection, Lord of the body, and Lord of the assembly. Everything we do together must be done under His authority and for His glory.

Holding Christ as Head is essential for the local church. Colossians 2:19 says the body is *"knit together"* and nourished from the Head. Just as the physical body receives nourishment through the head, the church receives nourishment from Christ. If we replace Him with a pope, pastor, or board, the body will not grow. True increase comes only from God (1 Corinthians 3:6–7). We plant and water, but God gives the increase.

Many believers feel overwhelmed because they try to draw strength from themselves or from other people. But Philippians 4:13 teaches that we endure all things through Christ who strengthens us. That strength comes through doctrine, through the Word of truth—learning that suffering produces patience, that trials identify us with Christ, that our affections should be set above. Strength comes from trusting the Head, not from self-effort.

Christ provides our life (Colossians 3:3–4), our grace (Ephesians 2:8–9), and our marching orders (Ephesians 2:10). We are saved by grace, but saved unto good works, which God ordained for us to walk in. This is why we gather—to do the work Christ gave us.

Our instructions come from Him, not from human visions or committees. 1 Timothy 6:12–15 shows Paul charging Timothy to keep Christ's commandments until His appearing, because Christ is *"the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords."* He witnessed before Pilate that all earthly authority is under God. Christ alone is immortal, glorious, and unapproachable in His light. That is the One we serve.

Blueprint for the Church

So the local church must hold Christ as its Head. Our nourishment, strength, growth, life, grace, and orders come from Him. We gather to serve Him, obey Him, and be ready to answer to Him when He appears.

Without Christ's grace working in people, leaders resort to law, punishment, and bondage. Authority without Christ becomes a religious system instead of a grace assembly.

Colossians 4:1 shows even earthly masters must remember they have a Master in heaven. In the local church, social status, wealth, or reputation do not make someone "lord." Everyone answers to Christ. If Christ is not held as Head, false authority rises—celebrity leaders, wealthy donors, traditions, rituals—and sound doctrine suffers.

Paul warns in Colossians 2:8 not to be spoiled by philosophy, traditions, or worldly rudiments that are *"not after Christ."* People often create visible symbols—buildings, rituals, beautiful paintings and pictures of a human's idea of Christ and other objects, all to *feel* God's presence. But these replace submission to Christ. Under grace, we have no physical representation of Christ to bow to. We hold the Head by trusting His Word and obeying His instructions.

Paul then lists ways churches replace Christ's authority.

Colossians 2:9 says all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ. Yet some worship "God" while treating Christ as secondary. Colossians 2:10 says we are complete in Christ, but churches often make people feel incomplete unless they join a denomination, receive a ritual, or follow a man. Colossians 2:11 says we are circumcised in Christ—yet religion invents acts to remove sin that Christ already removed. Confession rituals, rosaries, "Hail Marys," altar calls, and emotional experiences all attempt to do what Christ has already done.

Colossians 2:12 says we are buried with Christ in baptism and risen with Him through faith in God's operation. Yet churches argue endlessly about water, modes, and formulas. But baptism into Christ's death is God's work, not ours. To baptise people as a church sacrament is to displace Christ's authority. Holding the Head means honouring what Christ alone has done.

Colossians 2:13 says,

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

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Christ has forgiven all trespasses. No ritual can add to that. No church can remove sins Christ already removed.

Growth comes only from God. 1 Corinthians 3:6–7 says Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. The assembly grows spiritually only when Christ is held as Head. Strength comes from Him (Philippians 4:13). He strengthens us through doctrine—teaching us patience, long-suffering, heavenly affection, and the meaning of suffering with Him. Trusting the Head gives strength; trusting ourselves brings failure.

Life comes from Christ (Colossians 3:3–4). Grace comes from Him (Ephesians 2:8–9). And our marching orders come from Him (Ephesians 2:10). We are saved by grace, but saved unto good works. We gather to do the work He ordained.

1 Timothy 6:12–15 shows Christ as the blessed and only Potentate, King of kings and Lord of lords. He will appear, and we will answer to Him. So the local church must hold Him as Head—receiving nourishment, strength, growth, life, grace, and instruction from Him alone.

If Christ has forgiven all our trespasses (Colossians 2:13), then we do not need a priest. Paul never teaches a priesthood in this dispensation. Christ alone is the mediator between God and man, and forgiveness comes from His finished work on the cross, yet many churches act as if forgiveness must be obtained through their rituals. Paul says Christ has blotted out the handwriting of ordinances (Colossians 2:14). If He removed the ordinances, why do churches insist on you and me keeping them? Christ nailed them to His cross.

Paul adds, *“Let no man judge you in meat, drink, holy days, new moons, sabbaths”* (Colossians 2:16). Many churches build their identity around special days and religious seasons, but Paul says these were shadows for Israel. The body is of Christ. If Christ is our Head—our Lord, Master, Judge, and Commander—then our gatherings should honour Him, not traditions that have nothing to do with His work today.

Paul warns, *“Let no man beguile you of your reward”* (Colossians 2:18). When churches replace Christ’s headship with rituals, emotions, or human authority, believers lose reward because they stop serving Christ. People intrude into things they have not seen, puffed up by fleshly minds. This is how the ministry becomes flesh-pleasing religion instead of holding the Head.

Blueprint for the Church

In Colossians 2:9, Christ is the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Yet some treat Him as secondary and worship “God” apart from Christ.

Colossians 2:10: We are complete in Christ, but churches make people feel incomplete unless they join a denomination, receive a ritual, or follow a man.

Colossians 2:11: We are circumcised in Christ, yet religion invents acts to remove sin that Christ already removed.

Colossians 2:12: We are buried with Christ in baptism, yet churches argue endlessly about water (sprinkle or submerged) modes or processes, and formulas. Baptism into Christ’s death is *God’s* operation, not ours.

When churches baptise, impose rituals, or claim sacramental authority, they usurp or displace Christ’s work. Holding the Head means honouring what Christ alone has done and refusing to let men take His place.

Religious systems hide Christ’s headship. They create holy days, robes, pulpits, altars, rituals, and physical objects to “feel God’s presence.” Roman Catholicism attracts evangelicals because it offers tangible symbols—bread, statues, candles—that seem to make Christ present. But Christ is in heaven, and we operate by faith, not sight. When people seek physical experiences, they stop holding the Head and bring Christ down to earthly objects.

These things are “commandments and doctrines of men” (Colossians 2:22). They have a “show of wisdom” and “will-worship,” but they neglect the body. People confuse their own will with God’s will because they do not know Scripture. False humility keeps them silent when truth is compromised, but the true local assembly must stand fast, call out error, restore the fallen, and protect Christ’s headship.

Holding the Head means rejecting religious rudiments and standing on Christ alone—His authority, His work, His Word, His grace. Only then can the church function as the pillar and ground of the truth.

A growing trend in churches today is religious fasting, promoted as a way to gain spiritual power or growth. But Colossians 2:23 warns that such practices only satisfy the fleshly desire to perform religious works. They are not “in any honour” and do not hold Christ as the Head. Neglecting the body does not produce spiritual growth; Christ does. When churches teach fasting, tithing, or other rituals as spiritual requirements, they replace Christ’s instructions with human tradition.

Blueprint for the Church

Christ rules the church through His Word, not through religious systems.

Colossians 3:16 says,

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Even our singing is meant to teach and admonish with right doctrine. A local church must be governed by Christ's words, not by ceremonies, emotions, or man-made rules.

Christ also rules the church by giving each member personal responsibility.

Ephesians 6:5–8 teaches servants to obey earthly masters “*as unto Christ*,” knowing the Lord rewards every good thing done. This means every believer has direct accountability to Christ. When believers serve Him individually and then gather together, they can hold one another accountable to hold the Head.

Christ does **not** rule the church through a single human authority. There is no CEO, pope, or denominational head in the body of Christ. Paul describes elders, bishops, and deacons, but their role is to facilitate order—not to replace Christ's authority. When churches remove Scripture and remove personal responsibility, they remove Christ's headship. What remains is a false authority and a false church.

Two major failures cause a church to stop holding the Head:

1. Removing the Word of Christ—replacing Scripture with bylaws, traditions, rituals, or emotional experiences.
2. Removing personal responsibility—placing leaders into the assembly claiming to answer to God on behalf of the people, or claiming exclusive authority to interpret Scripture.

When either of these happens, Christ's authority is usurped/displaced. The assembly becomes a religious system instead of a body knit together from the Head.

A true assembly based on Paul's instructions must hold Christ's Word in high importance and honour the responsibility He gives each member. Every believer has equal spiritual standing under the Head. Elders and deacons help maintain order, but they do not possess greater spiritual authority.

Blueprint for the Church

Holding the Head also requires love for the Lord. Ephesians 6:24 says grace is with all who *“love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.”* We cannot truly serve someone we do not love. Christ does not threaten us with a sword; we serve Him because He saved us, gave us grace, and is worthy of our devotion. This love keeps us from creating systems that would make ministry easier in the world’s eyes but would dishonour Christ.

This is why the qualifications for bishops and deacons include proven love for the Lord and proven faithfulness. Giving authority to people who do not understand Christ’s headship creates danger. 1 Corinthians 16:22 says, *“If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema.”* Love for Christ is essential for anyone serving in the assembly.

So a local church holds the Head by keeping Christ’s Word central, and honouring each believer’s responsibility to Him, rejecting man-made religious systems, and serving the Lord out of sincere love.

Christ is not physically present to defend His own authority. He will judge in the future, but in this age of grace He does not stop us from teaching tithing or creating traditions. What stops us is love for right doctrine and love for the Lord Himself. We gather to remind each other of this—to worship Christ, hold the Head, and serve Him, not simply to be “right.”

Romans 16:17–18 shows how love for Christ shapes the assembly. Paul says to mark those who cause divisions “contrary to the doctrine.” Not every disagreement is wrong; the issue is doctrine that opposes what Paul taught.

Those who stand for truth should be honoured. Those who oppose sound doctrine should be avoided. Paul explains that such people *“serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly.”* They use good words and fair speeches to deceive the simple—those who do not yet know how to hold the Head.

Many churches today serve the appetites of the flesh—religious pride, entertainment, money, reputation. They build systems that satisfy people rather than honouring Christ. They turn the assembly into a recreation centre, a business, or a social club. But the local church exists only to serve Christ, not human desires. Our union is *with* Him. Our worship is *for* Him. Our ministry is *to* Him.

Blueprint for the Church

This is why the true assembly should eat together, remembering the Lord's death "till he come." We should gather because He is our Lord, and we practice submission to Him. The flesh resists this—"I don't want to go," "I don't want to minister"—but we are servants of Christ. One day we will answer to Him. Gathering together now, today, trains us to submit to the Head.

Holding the Head means loving Christ, standing for His doctrine, avoiding those who oppose it, and refusing to let the assembly become a place that serves human appetites. It means remembering that Christ is the Lord of the local church, and we meet to honour Him, worship Him, and practice our submission to Him together.

Bishops, Deacons and Elders

Paul's teaching on positions in the local church is controversial, and many denominations divide over church structure. Yet Paul gives a clear pattern.

Before discussing bishops, elders, and deacons, we must remember what was established in the last chapter. There is only one Head of the church—Jesus Christ. No matter how many positions exist in a local assembly, no leader has authority over truth, salvation, forgiveness, or membership in the body. Christ alone provides those things.

This means elders and deacons cannot determine doctrine, forgive sins, or make someone part of the church. Those belong to Christ's finished work. Paul *does* teach that the local assembly needs positions of responsibility to guard doctrine and maintain order.

Paul himself is the pattern (1 Timothy 1:16). In 1 Timothy, Paul writes to Timothy—an elder and bishop—explaining how to organise and maintain doctrinal and behavioural order in the assembly. Timothy learned the gospel from Paul, making Paul his “father in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2). This reflects the basic meaning of “elder”—someone who came before you in the faith and can guide you.

Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:3,

As I besought thee [Timothy] to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine,

This is the first responsibility of church leadership: guard the doctrine. The church exists to be “*the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Timothy 3:15). If truth is lost, the church loses its purpose. Elders must ensure no false teaching enters the assembly.

Paul warns Timothy about those who teach fables, genealogies, and law-keeping (1 Timothy 1:4–7). Some desire to be teachers of the law but do not understand what they say. This is why elders must know sound doctrine and be able to correct error. When the church is functioning well, elders may be quiet because things are in order. But when wrong teaching arises, someone must have the responsibility to step in.

Blueprint for the Church

Paul reminds Timothy that he must “*war a good warfare*” (1 Timothy 1:18). This warfare is not physical but doctrinal—protecting the assembly from error. Some have “*made shipwreck*” of the faith (1 Timothy 1:19). Timothy must confront such situations. This shows why positions are needed, because strong believers must help the weak, correct misunderstandings, and maintain direction.

A healthy church does not avoid all conflict.

Rebuke, correction, and restoration are part of ministry. It is not healthy when people leave simply because they disagree. Elders help mediate, restore, and guide. They are not rulers over people’s faith but guardians of truth and order.

So Paul establishes positions—elders, bishops, deacons—not to create a hierarchy that replaces Christ, but to facilitate the church’s mission: guarding doctrine, maintaining order, helping the weak, and ensuring the assembly remains the pillar and ground of the truth. These positions exist only under Christ’s headship and only to serve His purpose for the local church.

Paul continues explaining order in the local church throughout 1 Timothy. Positions in the assembly exist because without order, doctrine scatters and the church becomes chaos—like it was at Corinth, where divisions, cliques, and false teaching flourished because no one corrected error and no one submitted to correction. Paul repeatedly says, “*Let all things be done decently and in order*” (1 Corinthians 14:40).

When he visited Corinth, he said he would “set things in order” (1 Corinthians 11:34). Order is necessary for a church to minister one truth, one gospel, one Lord, one faith.

The first step in establishing order—whether in a home, government, or church—is identifying where authority comes from. Believers have liberty and must be persuaded in their own minds, but the assembly must still teach one doctrine. If everyone simply follows their own opinion, the church moves in a thousand directions at once. So Paul gives positions, not to rule over souls, but to guard doctrine and maintain unity.

These positions are not lords over our souls. Hebrews 13:17 speaks of rulers who “*watch for your souls*,” but that is Israel’s system. In the body of Christ, your soul is in Christ’s hands alone. Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:12 that he has committed himself to Christ against *that day*.

Blueprint for the Church

"That Day" is a favourite expression of Paul's. It refers to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and particularly to the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Christ is the only Head. Church leaders are not vicars or substitutes for Christ. The Pope claims to be the "Vicar of Christ," but no bishop, elder, or deacon who studies Paul's epistles could possibly replace Christ or sit in His seat.

Instead, leaders exist for order, doctrinal strength, and organisation. The beauty of the assembly that's based on Paul's instructions is that every member can study Scripture, every member is part of Christ's body, and every member can minister. But some are weaker in the faith, and some are stronger. Some have responsibility in the assembly, and some do not. Positions simply recognise this reality.

Churches have, for a very long time, fought over structure. Many use biblical words (deacon, bishop, elder) but fail to rightly divide the word, and they miss what these offices are actually intended for. Congregational churches emphasise majority rule. Episcopalians emphasise bishops ruling regions. Presbyterians emphasise elder boards. But all these systems tend to import Israel's kingdom structure into the body of Christ. They assume the church is building the kingdom now, so they create leaders who act like kings. But the church is not Israel, and our goal is not kingdom dominion. Our goal is edification and order.

Much of the corruption in the leadership of the organised church comes from wrong doctrine. Tithing is taught to give pastors Old Testament priestly authority. But Paul never uses the word "priest." In Israel, priests mediated forgiveness (Leviticus 4:20). Judges and apostles could remit sins (John 20:23). Peter had keys of the kingdom and power to bind and loose (Matthew 16:19). But none of this applies to the body of Christ. We are not a nation with land, tribes, and kings. We are a spiritual body under one Head.

Rightly dividing the Word of Truth solves most leadership abuses. When churches import Israel's system—priests, kings, sacraments, tithing—they create false authority. Paul's pattern is different. Positions exist only to guard doctrine, maintain order, help the weak, and keep the assembly functioning as *"the pillar and ground of the truth"* (1 Timothy 3:15).

Blueprint for the Church

Many churches use excommunication to decide who is “in” or “out” of the church, and that power is given to priests or bishops. But according to Paul, no one has authority to remove a believer from the body of Christ. If we trust the gospel, no earthly office can take away our standing. We have riches in Christ that no position can touch. Yet Paul does teach that the local assembly needs order, and therefore needs positions—just not positions that control salvation or forgiveness.

Israel’s kingdom program had thrones (Matthew 19:28), priests who mediated forgiveness (Leviticus 4:20), apostles who could remit sins (John 20:23), and Peter with keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:19). Churches today often copy this by putting thrones on stages, treating pastors like kings, and giving leaders power to discipline and punish. But Paul never teaches this for the body of Christ. We are not Israel, not a kingdom nation, and not under priestly authority.

Paul says plainly in 1 Timothy 2:5,

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

A bishop or deacon is not a mediator.

Christ alone deals with our sins. The church is not a building, and Hebrews 10:25 is not written to us. Hebrews warns kingdom saints about forsaking assembly as the Day of the Lord approaches, and Hebrews 10:26 threatens judgment for willful sin. Churches wrongly apply this to Sunday attendance and use it to control people. But Hebrews is written to Israel under the New Covenant, not to the body of Christ.

Likewise, Hebrews 13:17 says leaders “*watch for your souls.*” That is not Paul’s teaching. In the body of Christ, only the Lord watches for our souls. Leaders in an assembly of the church, based on Paul’s instructions, do not rule our spiritual destiny. They help maintain order and guard doctrine.

Paul’s epistles also do not describe modern business-style church positions—children’s pastors, worship leaders, counselling pastors, or department heads. These roles exist because churches function like corporations. But Paul’s offices relate only to the church’s biblical purpose: teaching sound doctrine, maintaining order, equipping saints, and guarding the truth. Sweeping floors, managing food, or organising childcare are practical tasks, not spiritual offices. They can be delegated, but they are not biblical positions.

Blueprint for the Church

Counselling is not the job of one “pastor of counselling.” It is the work of the whole body, especially those strong in the faith. Worship is not a music performance, so there is no “worship leader.” Paul never uses the word priest for the church. He uses bishop, deacon, and elder, and even the word “pastor” only appears once, in Ephesians 4:11.

Ephesians 4:11 lists apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers—not tongue-talkers, healers, or performers. These roles existed to establish the church before Scripture was complete. Today Scripture **is** complete. Today, the local assembly follows Paul’s pattern: Christ as the Head, Scripture as the authority, and bishops, elders, and deacons serving—not ruling—to maintain order, guard doctrine, and help the saints minister together.

Many churches treat Ephesians 4:11 as a blueprint for church offices, but Paul is describing spiritual gifts given at the beginning of the dispensation of grace. Verse 8 says Christ “gave gifts unto men,” and verse 11 explains that the gifts were people—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers—supernaturally empowered by the Spirit to establish the church. This was foundational. It is not the ongoing structure of the local assembly.

Paul shows the same list in 1 Corinthians 12:28, alongside tongues, healing, and other supernatural gifts.

These belonged to the early church when the Spirit was revealing truth directly. Today, the Spirit dwells in every believer, but He does not give supernatural offices. Instead, we have Scripture today, complete Scripture, which wasn't the case back then. Paul's letters became Scripture later.

1 Timothy 3 says, *“If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desires a good work.”*

Desire comes first—not a mystical “calling.” Then he must be proved blameless. Only after that is he ordained. This is very different from churches that appoint deacons simply because someone shows up two or three times and smiles nicely.

So Ephesians 4:11 is not the structure of the church today. It describes the Spirit’s foundational work. The modern church follows Paul’s instructions in the pastoral epistles.

Blueprint for the Church

Now, where do you and I fit? If we are saved, we are a member of the body of Christ. Membership is by faith alone, not by denominational vote, baptismal certificate, money, or attendance. We can be a member of Christ's body even if we never join a local assembly—though we will grow slower and help fewer people without a true assembly, based on Paul's instructions. All spiritual blessings were given the moment we believed the gospel.

Ministry is not limited to ordained offices. Every believer is called to serve as an ambassador (1 Timothy 2:4). Titus 2 also shows this clearly. Paul instructs aged men, aged women, young men, and young women—all ordinary members—to teach, exhort, and model godliness. Ministry belongs to everyone. The local assembly is not a spectator event where one “called” man does all the work. We gather so all members can learn, grow, and minister to each other.

This means the church contains many types of members—different ages, different levels of maturity and different strengths. Offices like bishop and deacon are not based on age. “Elder” does not mean “senior citizen.” It means someone who has gone before you in the faith, someone proven, someone strong enough to help guide others.

So Paul's pattern is simple:

- Ephesians 4:11 describes early Spirit-given gifts, not permanent offices.
- 1 Timothy 3 describes today's offices—bishops and deacons—chosen by evidence of their own desire and ability to pass on the love of Christ, proven character, and possessing sound doctrine consisting of the knowledge of the mystery and the ability to rightly divide the Word of truth.
- Membership of the church, the Body of Christ, is by faith alone.
- Ministry belongs to every believer.
- Elders are those mature in doctrine, not those of a certain age.

A local church is a gathering of saints where all members grow and serve, and where bishops and deacons simply help maintain order and guard doctrine under the one true Head—Jesus Christ.

Not everyone in a local church is at the same level of understanding. New believers are always weak, no matter how long they previously attended church. They must relearn Scripture without tradition. Even older believers may remain weak if they have not learned right doctrine. Strength comes through growth—knowing salvation, learning God's Word, personal sanctification, and then ministry. Offices require this maturity.

Blueprint for the Church

All believers should strive toward this strength. 1 Timothy and Titus give qualifications not only for leaders but as models for all saints. We do not discard these books because we are not bishops; we read them to grow into maturity.

Paul identifies two offices: bishop and deacon, who are both “elders” in the sense that they are mature and ordained to help set things in order. Titus 1:5 shows this clearly. Paul left Titus in Crete *“to set in order the things that are wanting”* and *“ordain elders in every city.”* Elders are those who can establish order both in doctrine and in behaviour.

Paul lists qualifications: blameless, husband of one wife, faithful children, not self-willed, not soon angry, sober, just, holy. These are not rigid checkboxes but descriptions of someone who knows how to live orderly and can help others do the same. *“Husband of one wife”* simply means a man who lives in proper order, not someone who meets a legalistic marital requirement. *“Faithful children”* means he knows how to guide the weak without harshness. These traits show he can set order in God’s house.

A bishop is an elder who oversees and guards doctrine. A deacon is an elder who serves and assists in practical matters. Both must be proven mature. No one meets every qualification perfectly, but leaders must show consistent strength. If someone is weak in these areas, they should not be placed in office.

Paul also shows that eldership is connected to spiritual fatherhood. In 1 Corinthians 4:15, he says, *“I have begotten you through the gospel.”* That doesn't mean he saved them. It means they heard the gospel from him. He was before them, so they owed him respect as an elder. This is why 1 Timothy 5 says, *“Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father.”*

An elder may be wrong, but you approach him gently because he helped you learn the truth. A father is not just a teacher; he cares, exhorts, and gives responsibility. Elders function this way in the assembly—they help guide, protect, and strengthen others.

So the Pauline pattern for leadership is simple:

- Elders are spiritually mature believers.
- Bishops and deacons are the two forms of elders.
- Offices require desire, proven character, and ordination.
- Strength in the faith—not age, popularity, or money—determines suitability.

Blueprint for the Church

- All believers should grow toward this maturity.
- Elders set things in order so the church assembly can minister, grow, and remain grounded in truth.

This is how Paul structures the local assembly under the one true Head, Jesus Christ.

Peter also shows this principle.

In 1 Peter 5:1–3, he calls himself “an elder” because he witnessed Christ’s sufferings and ministered before others. Eldership means those who have gone before in the faith. Peter instructs elders to feed the flock, take oversight willingly, not for money, and not as lords over God’s heritage, but as examples. This matches Paul’s teaching: elders are not rulers over souls; they are mature believers who guide others.

If a leader becomes corrupt, Paul gives clear instruction: first try to correct him, but if he persists, withdraw. Avoid false teachers (Romans 16:17). Elders must be correctable, humble, and motivated by ministry, not power or gain.

Paul’s goal for leadership is seen in Philippians 3:17: *“Mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.”*

Elders are not Christ, but they should model Paul’s pattern so others can follow sound doctrine. Leadership exists to provide examples of maturity.

1 Timothy 3:13 says deacons who serve well *“purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith.”* This “degree” is not a diploma but proof of their capability. A deacon must already be bold in the faith before being appointed. Offices do not create maturity; maturity qualifies someone for office.

In Acts 14:21–23, Paul evangelises cities, strengthens believers, and then ordains elders. He does not appoint novices. Elders are those who have proven themselves by continuing in the faith, enduring tribulation, and encouraging others. Only after believers show strength does Paul ordain them.

Paul ordains elders in every church, and these elders fall into two categories: bishops and deacons. Both are elders, but with different responsibilities.

- Deacons are elders who minister directly to the members—serving, helping, and caring for the assembly.
- Bishops are elders who oversee the deacons and the assembly. They inspect, guard doctrine, and maintain order. They are “presiding elders,” responsible for direction and correction.

Blueprint for the Church

A bishop must first meet all the qualifications of a deacon and then show additional strength in oversight. A deacon must be proven in ministry, bold in the faith, and able to care for others. A bishop must be able to rule well, guard doctrine, and set things in order.

Paul's pattern is:

- Elders are spiritually mature believers who have gone before others in the faith.
- Deacons minister to the saints.
- Bishops oversee the ministry and guard doctrine.
- All elders must be proven, not novices.
- Their motivation must be ministry, not money or power.
- Their authority is limited—they do not rule souls, only help maintain order under Christ.

This is Paul's structure: a local assembly led by mature elders—bishops and deacons—who serve under the one true Head, Jesus Christ.

Many churches treat the office of deacon as a position of control—get on the board, vote, and change the church. But Paul never describes deacons this way. A deacon is not a political role or a stepping-stone to power. A deacon is a servant, someone who takes on more burden, not less. Christ said the one who is first must be last. A deacon is the one who ministers where others are lacking, who carries responsibility for the saints.

This is why people who want the title for influence quickly disappear when told they must first be proved. A deacon is not chosen because he wants a stage or a vote. He is chosen because he already ministers faithfully, boldly, and with integrity.

Paul's structure is not a democracy. There is one Head, Christ. So the church does not need fifteen “heads.” It needs bishops who oversee and warn, and deacons who serve. The office simply formalises what ministry already looks like.

1 Timothy 3:8–13 is the only passage that defines deacons. They must be grave, not double-tongued, not greedy, holding “*the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience*.” This means a deacon must understand the mystery of Christ and rightly divide Scripture. He must have integrity—no compromise. He must be proven in ministry before being ordained.

Blueprint for the Church

Verse 10 says, “Let these also first be proved.”

They must show doctrinal soundness, purity of conscience, and ability to minister.

Verse 11 adds that their wives must also be faithful and sober, because a deacon's home reflects his ability to set things in order. Verse 12 says he must rule his house well. Verse 13 says those who serve well “*purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith.*” Boldness is required before ordination, not gained afterwards.

So the path to becoming a deacon is:

1. Desire – shown by zeal and willingness to serve.
2. Being proved – demonstrating doctrinal integrity and ministry ability.
3. Ordination – the elders recognise and mark him as trustworthy.

Paul tells the church to submit to such men. In 1 Corinthians 16:15–16, he points to the house of Stephanas, who “*addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,*” and says, “*submit yourselves unto such.*” These were deacons—people devoted to ministry, not power. They could fill in for the bishop when needed and help lead when Paul moved on.

Deacons are not rulers. They are strong servants who hold the mystery of the faith, minister boldly, and care for the saints. Bishops are elders who oversee deacons and guard doctrine. Both are elders, but with different responsibilities. Elders are those proven strong in the faith, motivated by ministry, not money or control.

This is Paul's pattern:

- Deacons serve the saints.
- Bishops oversee and guard doctrine.
- Elders are spiritually mature believers.
- All offices require desire, proven character, and ordination.
- Christ alone is the Head.

A Paul-inspired church assembly is led by mature servants, not political boards, and all ministry is done under the authority of Christ.

Blueprint for the Church

Paul describes Timothy's work as a bishop in 1 Timothy 4. Timothy must put the brethren in remembrance of sound doctrine, avoid doctrines of devils, reject hypocrisy, and oppose false teachings like abstaining from meats. He must command and teach (4:11), be an example in word, conversation, charity, spirit, faith, and purity (4:12), and give attendance to reading, exhortation, and doctrine (4:13). This is the bishop's work—doctrinal vigilance, exhortation, and continual teaching.

Paul reminds Timothy that his gift was recognised by the presbytery (the elders) who laid hands on him (4:14). Timothy must meditate on doctrine, give himself wholly to it, and take heed to himself and the doctrine (4:15–16). By doing this, he preserves both himself and those who hear him. A bishop's first duty is to grow in the Lord so that his ministry overflows to others.

The church assembly needs bishops and deacons. Without them, assemblies drift, lose order, and fall into error. With them, the church continues in sound doctrine and proper practice.

Decently and in Order

In this chapter we continue to define what the church is and how the local assembly should operate according to the apostle Paul's clear pattern in Scripture.

Paul's pattern shows that the church assembly must do all things “*decently and in order*” (1 Corinthians 14:40).

In the last chapter we saw that Paul established elders, bishops, and deacons to keep order. Without these offices, a church becomes chaotic, directionless, and unable to function as the pillar and ground of the truth.

The Corinthians are the prime example of disorder. Though they knew the gospel and rejoiced in their liberty, they ignored the responsibilities of gathering together, ministering, and submitting to proper order. Many church assemblies fall into the same trap—boasting that they are not organised religion, as if disorder were a virtue. But the opposite of organised religion is simply disorganised religion, which accomplishes nothing.

Paul never gives us a ritual schedule. He does not prescribe standing, sitting, reciting prayers, or performing ceremonies, but he does give order. He rebukes the Corinthians for their disorder at the Lord's Supper and says, “*The rest will I set in order when I come*” (1 Corinthians 11:34). He commands them to regulate teaching and speaking so that chaos does not reign (1 Corinthians 14). Order is not optional; it is part of Paul's doctrine.

A true Paul-inspired church assembly does not follow the trappings of modern Christianity—no mass, no tithing plates, no ritual calendar, no scripted service step by step service, but that does not mean a lack of order. Paul's order is rooted in purpose, not ceremony. The church exists for one main reason: to be the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). Everything must support that purpose. Without that purpose, all we have is a social club designed for the fun and amusement of its members.

Paul tells Timothy that a good minister puts the brethren “*in remembrance of these things*,” being nourished in “*the words of faith and good doctrine*” (1 Timothy 4:6). Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17), so the church assembly must preserve, teach, and exhort from Scripture and AScripture undistorted by human intervention. 1 Timothy 4:13 says, “*Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine*”. Without Scripture, there is no reason to meet at all.

Blueprint for the Church

Today many church assemblies have replaced Bible reading with entertainment—jokes, stories, or an entire message centred on a single verse. But Paul's instruction is simple: read the Scripture, exhort from it, and teach doctrine. That is the order of the church.

So Paul's pattern for order is:

- The church gathers to uphold and teach the truth.
- Scripture is central—reading, exhortation, doctrine.
- Elders, bishops, and deacons maintain order and direction.
- Disorder, chaos, and ritualism are rejected.
- The assembly functions with purpose, not ceremony.

This order is not restriction—it is necessary. Without it, the church loses its grounding, its mission, and its ability to minister. With it, the church can grow, edify, and remain faithful to Christ.

Paul tells Timothy that elders who “rule well” are worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17). This is because the whole point of gathering is the ministry of Scripture.

Scripture itself defines the church's function. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 says, *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

These three functions—doctrine, correction, and equipping—are also the three functions of the church.

Paul prays the same pattern in Colossians 1:9–10:

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

Col 1:10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

This is why believers should gather. Alone, we miss correction, accountability, and the sharpening that comes from other members. Together, we grow in doctrine, walk worthy, and produce good works.

The church service is not what happens from the pulpit to the people. The service is what believers provide to one another as they minister, exhort, and grow together. This is why Paul insists on order: without which the church cannot fulfil its purpose as the pillar and ground of the truth.

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After believers learn right doctrine, the next function of the local church is sanctification or learning to walk in the sanctification we received the moment we believed (1 Corinthians 1:30, 1 Corinthians 6:11, Romans 15:16).

1 Thessalonians 4 says God's will is our sanctification—being set apart from the world to serve Him.

Sanctification is the separation from ordinary use to a sacred purpose. How to walk in this already received sanctification is part of our learning process.

Knowing doctrine is one thing; living a life separated from sin, wrong doctrine, and worldly desires is a much bigger step. Yet this is what God calls every believer to pursue. The church exists to promote that sanctification.

None of us serves the Lord perfectly. We all bring our old man, our habits, and our baggage into the assembly, so sanctification requires reproof and correction. When we gather, we remind each other of what is right, and we realign ourselves to God's will (Ephesians 5:15-17). We redeem the time because the days are evil.

The church assembly should warn against wrong doctrine because false teaching can destroy weaker believers. We may be strong enough to resist an error, but someone else may not be. Without the assembly, we would never see that. Sanctification is not just for you and me—it protects the whole body.

If all the church accomplished was helping us live a sanctified life so that our days were spent serving the Lord, that alone would be worth it. At the judgment, a sanctified life will be a good day for us.

Another function of the church is service—actual ministry to one another. Paul's epistles are full of "one another" instructions. We should greet one another (Romans 16), provide a place where believers are welcomed without fear. We should eat together (1 Corinthians 11), rejoicing in our communion with Christ and each other. We should speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4), often staying long after meetings to discuss Scripture, ask questions, and sharpen one another. After all, what else do we have to do that's more important than that?

We should pray for one another, bringing needs before God. Prayer is not a selfish demand; it is trust in the God who saved our souls. But we cannot pray for each other if we never gather and talk.

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In a true church fellowship, we should love one another with brotherly love. We comfort and honour one another (1 Timothy 5). We recognise honourable choices and spiritual growth, knowing the Lord will reward such things (1 Corinthians 3). We give as an expression of grace (Acts 20; 2 Corinthians 9). Giving reflects what we purpose in our hearts, which reveals our sanctification. Ministry often acts as a mirror—if we are not serving, we are not being sanctified.

Paul also says we should weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12). This requires charity and maturity. It requires being present with other believers.

The end goal of Christian growth is:

- Edification — learning doctrine.
- Sanctification — walking worthy.
- Service — doing good works.

Ministry does not start with new believers. Many churches place new converts into ministry positions immediately, but they are not ready. They need doctrine and sanctification first. Mature service comes only after growth.

This is why we should meet: to learn, to be corrected, to be sanctified, and finally to serve one another in the body of Christ.

A church assembly operating in proper order affects not only its members but also the world. When believers walk in truth, sanctification, and service, the church becomes a clear voice of Christ in society—standing for truth, offering correction, and serving the world as ambassadors. Disorder destroys that witness. Today many churches have no voice because they are dysfunctional, and they are dysfunctional because the leaders are dysfunctional—neglecting Scripture, resisting correction, and avoiding good works. Order begins with the individual, then the assembly, and then reaches the world.

This is the ideal: a church functioning decently and in order. But disorder often appears. Disorder is a malfunction of the local assembly and usually comes from one of two failures:

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1. Leadership failure — elders and bishops neglect doctrine, avoid sanctification, or fail to exhort believers to serve.
2. Failure to submit to truth — people refuse to learn, and won't open their Bibles, or resist correction.

Both problems are common today. Many leaders act like entertainers or babysitters instead of ministers of truth. What the church assembly needs are people dedicated to knowing the truth, teaching the same and serving in Christ's body.

Paul explains that spiritual leadership belongs to those who are mature in doctrine, sanctified in life, and committed to serving. 1 Corinthians 2:13–16 says the spiritual man “judges all things.” This is leadership—those who have grown through doctrine, correction, and service can discern and guide. This is why the goal for every believer should be to grow into this maturity.

The elders—bishops and deacons—hold the primary responsibility for maintaining order.

When disorder appears, we must ask: What is not being done correctly? Leaders are responsible for the direction of the assembly. Many assemblies replace doctrine with entertainment because “doctrine divides,” and divisions make people leave, and when they leave, numbers drop, and the financial benefits drop. Leaders avoid reproof because it offends. But avoiding truth destroys sanctification. When a leader admits something is sin but refuses to preach it, sanctification collapses.

As we saw in the last chapter, Paul gives clear qualifications for leaders. 1 Timothy 3:4–5 says a bishop must “*rule well his own house*.” This applies to deacons too. If a man cannot keep order in his home, he cannot keep order in the local church. The home is the training ground; the church is the greater responsibility. Ruling does not mean dictatorship—it means guiding others who willingly submit because they trust the headship God has established. Grace teaches us to submit to proper authority, beginning with Christ Himself.

So church order depends on leaders who rule well, teach truth, warn against error, promote sanctification, and encourage service. And it depends on believers who willingly submit to Scripture and to the order Christ established through Paul.

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Paul uses family imagery to show how church order mirrors home order. In 1 Thessalonians 2:7–11, he compares himself to a gentle mother and an exhorting father. The same functions of the local church—edifying, sanctifying, serving—are the same functions of a godly parent. If homes operate well, local churches operate well.

In Ephesians 5–6, Paul assumes proper order in the home: husbands loving sacrificially, wives submitting, children obeying, fathers nurturing and admonishing. These same principles apply to the local church leadership. Elders must rule without provoking wrath, guiding believers in doctrine, sanctification, and service.

Order always requires obedience to truth. 2 Thessalonians 3:14 shows that the church is not a democracy. Like a family, it has a God-given structure. God is at the top, and His Word governs all.

The Bible is the final rule of the church.

2 Thessalonians 3:14 says that if someone *“obey not our word by this epistle,”* the church must note that person and have no company with him so he may be ashamed.

Paul uses the word obey, which should not be avoided. Obedience to Scripture is necessary for order, leadership, and submission in the church.

This principle applies in society as well. Titus 3:1–2 tells believers to be subject to rulers and obey magistrates, even when they dislike them. Order requires obedience to a higher authority. Paul reminds us that we were once foolish and disobedient ourselves, so obedience does not mean perfection. Leaders are not perfect, parents are not perfect, and church members are not perfect. But obedience to God’s Word keeps order in homes, local churches, and society.

If doctrine is not working in our family and us, it will not work in the church. Order begins with individuals, then families, then the assembly. When families operate in biblical order, local churches can operate in biblical order, and together they can minister to the world.

Paul identifies common malfunctions in local churches.

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The first and most serious is failure to teach right doctrine. When a local church abandons the edifying function, it destroys itself. Many large churches avoid doctrine for the sake of growth, preferring to reach a lifestyle message to attract the large numbers of people in the world that are seeking a "better life", but according to Scripture, they are not functioning as true churches. Sound doctrine—God's Word rightly divided—is the foundation of an orderly local church.

Paul warns in Romans 16:17 to mark and avoid those who cause divisions contrary to the doctrine learned. This requires knowing doctrine first. Only then can we recognise error, and then we must have the integrity to separate from false teaching.

2 Timothy 2:15–18 shows how serious doctrinal error is. After commanding Timothy to rightly divide the word of truth, Paul says to shun profane and vain babblings because they lead to ungodliness. Profanity is treating God's truth as common or unimportant. Wrong doctrine spreads like a canker. Paul names Hymenaeus and Philetus, who taught that *"the resurrection is past already,"* overthrowing the faith of some. Many believers would not even recognise this error as dangerous, yet Paul says it destroys faith. This is why elders must know doctrine well enough to see dangers ahead and protect the assembly.

In 1 Corinthians 11:17–19, Paul rebukes the Corinthians because their gatherings caused more harm than good. Divisions existed because *"there must be also heresies among you."* Wrong doctrine had already corrupted their behaviour.

Later, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul confronts their denial of the resurrection and warns that without it they are still in their sins. 1 Corinthians 15:33 summarises the problem: *"Evil communications corrupt good manners."* Wrong doctrine always produces wrong living.

So disorder in the church begins with doctrinal failure. When doctrine is neglected, sanctification collapses, service becomes empty, and the church loses its voice in the world. Order requires obedience to Scripture, mature leadership, and believers committed to truth, sanctification, and service.

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Disorder in the church always traces back to doctrinal failure. In 1 Corinthians 11:18–19, he says there are *“heresies among you,”* and that divisions arise because wrong doctrine is not being confronted. People often say, “Don’t talk about doctrine, it causes division.” But sometimes division is necessary—Scripture commands us to separate from those who teach error. If people in the church cannot get the gospel right, the church cannot preach the gospel. If they cannot rightly divide the Word of truth, no one will be edified. God’s church must be built on His Word, rightly divided.

Titus 3:10–11 gives the clearest instruction: *“A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject.”* Separation is not personal—it is doctrinal. A man may be respectable, friendly, or long-standing in the assembly, but if he teaches error and refuses correction, he must be removed from office. Paul says such a man is “subverted,” meaning he has placed himself above the truth and made himself an authority above Scripture. His teaching becomes sin, and he condemns himself by his very words. He may still be saved, but he cannot be allowed to corrupt the church.

The solution to false doctrine and the disorder it creates is simple: mark it and avoid it (Romans 16:17). Without attention to this, the church will malfunction and become a man-made religion far apart from what God intended.

A second disorder is learning disorder—not intellectual disability, but an environment where edification cannot happen. The primary function of the assembly is teaching and preaching. If communication breaks down, the church cannot grow. In 1 Corinthians 3:1–3, Paul says he could not speak to the Corinthians as spiritual but as “babes in Christ.” They were carnal, full of envy and strife, so he could only give them milk. Their behaviour made it impossible for him to teach deeper doctrine. Carnal believers resist Scripture; they want stories, entertainment, or “relevance,” not doctrine. They want tales of miraculous and it doesn't matter who they hear it from. They will turn to the news, social media or to the astute storyteller before they will turn to Scripture. They just don't see Scripture as being the only reliable source of truth. Even if they do, they would prefer someone else to tell it to them like a bedtime story, leaving themselves open to the contamination of the truth. This is a learning disorder.

Paul responds by speaking at their level in 1 Corinthians 2:2,

For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

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Babies cannot understand mature instruction, and immature believers cannot receive strong doctrine. Disorder in learning must be corrected before the local church can function.

A third disorder appears in 1 Corinthians 14, where the Corinthians misused tongues. They were spiritually immature yet had supernatural gifts, and their misuse created chaos. Paul spends the entire chapter establishing order, showing that tongues without interpretation create confusion. Every instruction he gives reduces tongue-talking and elevates clear communication. His point is simple: the church must understand what is taught. Anything that disrupts understanding disrupts edification.

Throughout his letters, Paul is correcting dysfunction—doctrinal, behavioural, and ministerial dysfunction. The ideal local church teaches sound doctrine, sanctifies believers, and serves one another. But when doctrine is wrong, learning is hindered, communication is confused, and disorder follows. Paul's pattern shows how elders must confront error, restore order, and protect the assembly so that Christ's body can grow in truth.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul shows that God is not the author of confusion. When the church gathers, communication must be clear so people can understand and be edified. Tongues do not edify believers; Paul says tongues are a sign for unbelievers. In 1 Corinthians 14:2, he explains that someone speaking in an unknown tongue “speaks not unto men, but unto God,” because no man understands him. Pentecostals often use this verse to defend “angelic languages,” but Paul's point is simply the opposite: if no one understands you, you create disorder.

Edification requires intelligible speech. 1 Corinthians 14:3 says prophecy—which is clear teaching—produces edification, exhortation, and comfort, the same three functions of the church and the same responsibilities of a father. Tongues only edify the speaker, which Paul rebukes. The church must be edified.

In 1 Corinthians 14:23–24, Paul says this,

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?

But if all prophesy, [clear teaching] and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all:

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So, if the whole church speaks in tongues and an unbeliever enters, he will think they are mad. Disorder destroys testimony. But if all is prophecy, clear teaching, the unbeliever can understand and be convicted.

So Paul commands order: 1 Corinthians 14:26,

“Let all things be done unto edifying.” If tongues occur, only two or three may speak, one at a time, and only with an interpreter. If there is no interpreter, 1 Corinthians 14:28 says the speaker must *“keep silence.”* This alone would end modern charismatic practice, which ignores Paul’s instructions and creates confusion in the assembly.

Paul concludes in 1 Corinthians 14:33: *“God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.”* So any learning disorder—noise, chaos, uninterpreted tongues—must be corrected. The church must be a place where Scripture is heard clearly.

Another disorder is behavioural disorder.

Modern church assemblies often ignore doctrine and tolerate sin, but Paul does not. In 1 Corinthians 5, he confronts open fornication in the assembly. Everyone knew about it, yet no one mourned or rebuked the man. Paul says the church must remove him: *“deliver such an one unto Satan... that the spirit may be saved.”* This is not about gossip or private sin; it is about public sin that corrupts others. In 2 Corinthians 7, the same man is later restored after showing godly sorrow. So separation is not cruelty—it is protection for the church and restoration for the sinner.

Leadership must rebuke sin. Titus 1:9–12 says a bishop must hold fast sound doctrine so he can *“exhort and convince the gainsayers.”* Some teachers in Crete were subverting whole houses, teaching wrong things for money. Paul says *“their mouths must be stopped.”* Titus is told to rebuke them sharply. When Titus confronts them, they accuse the church of hypocrisy—*“Cretans are always liars, evil beasts”*—just as false teachers today attack those who correct them. But Paul insists that leaders must silence false teaching because it destroys families and churches.

In every case, Paul’s solution is the same: clear doctrine, orderly communication, and firm rebuke. God’s church must operate *“decently and in order,”* with leaders who guard the truth and believers who submit to Scripture for the sake of edification, sanctification, and service.

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Paul teaches that behavioural disorder in the church must be dealt with openly and firmly. In Titus 1:13, he says, “*rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.*” The purpose of rebuke is not humiliation but restoration to right doctrine. If sin or false teaching appears, leaders must speak plainly about it. Many prominent and so-called famous preachers refuse to preach against sin, and that is the opposite of Paul’s instruction—wrong behaviour and wrong doctrine must be confronted.

Rebuke applies not only to ordinary members but also to elders. 1 Timothy 5:19–20 says accusations against an elder must have two or three witnesses, because elders should already be proven blameless. But if the accusation is true, the elder must be rebuked before all, “*that others also may fear.*” Leadership must remain blameless; if an elder falls into sin, he may need to step down for a time. This protects the church and preserves its testimony.

The final disorder Paul addresses is ministry disorder—believers who never grow beyond childhood in the faith. Some remain stuck at the edification stage, never moving into sanctification or service. This was a major problem in Corinth. They had knowledge, but knowledge “puffs up” when it is not used to help weaker brothers. In 1 Corinthians 8:12, Paul says that wounding a weaker brother’s conscience is sin against Christ. Ministry requires considering others, teaching them, and serving them.

Philippians 2:21 describes the problem: “*all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.*”

Believers naturally drift toward self-interest unless constantly exhorted. Paul praises Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:30, who nearly died supplying the service others failed to give. Ministry disorder is corrected when individuals grow in doctrine, pursue sanctification, and then step forward to serve—even if the church around them is weak. It may be that someone may need to be “the first” to grow, serve, and set an example.

Paul closes the circle in 2 Timothy 4:1–4. He charges Timothy to “*preach the word... reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*”

He warns that a time will come when people “*will not endure sound doctrine,*” choosing teachers who scratch their itching ears and turn to fables. This is the condition of much of modern Christianity—truth abandoned, doctrine avoided, and the church’s proper functions lost.

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The point is clear: the truth is the main priority of the church. Disorder—whether doctrinal, behavioural, or ministerial—always begins when truth is neglected. Order is restored when leaders rebuke sin, confront false doctrine, and believers commit themselves to growth, sanctification, and service. Only then can the church operate “decently and in order” as Christ intended.

When the Church Goes Wrong

We have been laying out what an ideal grace-based local assembly that rightly divides the Word of Truth should look like. Because that doctrine differs from most groups, it naturally affects how church is "done".

As we have repeatedly said, the church is not a building—it is people, the members of Christ's body. So the church's purpose is not entertainment or social activity. Those things can happen anywhere. The church's primary function is to preserve, teach, preach, and instil God's Word, the truth, about life and existence, in believers, and to evangelise others.

This produces the three biblical functions of a church:

1. Edification — teaching and preaching sound doctrine.
2. Sanctification — doctrine working in us, the believer, and separating us from the world through the forming of godly living.
3. Service/Ministry — mature believers helping others learn the gospel and grow in truth.

A healthy church assembly is not a place of constant consumption where one person recites, another sings a song, and the congregation sit and is entertained. When we are young in the faith, we come to learn and be sanctified. But maturity means contributing—serving others, strengthening the assembly, and helping the work continue.

2 Timothy 2:15 says we study to become approved workmen, not merely students. The goal is service. The tool God gave for this is 2 Timothy 3:16–17: *all Scripture*, perfect and sufficient, profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction so the believer is *"thoroughly furnished unto all good works."* God's Word is perfect; we are not. So the assembly is full of imperfect people pressing toward maturity.

Because we are imperfect, local church assemblies will go wrong. A local assembly must have people prepared to deal with problems. This is why Paul established elders—not merely older men, but those mature in doctrine who can identify error and protect the people.

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As we saw in the last chapter, Paul shows three major malfunctions:

1. Doctrinal Malfunction

Wrong doctrine must be corrected. Elders must be able to see where a teaching leads and warn the assembly. 1 Corinthians 14 shows how communication problems (like uninterpreted tongues) destroy edification. Paul sets rules: one speaker at a time, two or three at most, and only with interpretation. Clear communication is essential for doctrine.

2. Behavioural Malfunction

Open sin must be addressed. 1 Timothy 3 requires elders to rule their homes well because behavioural order matters. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul commands the assembly to confront and remove a man living in public sin. If there is no repentance, he must leave. This protects the testimony of the church.

3. Ministry Malfunction

Some believers never grow beyond learning. They remain spiritual children and never serve. 2 Timothy 3:7 describes the condition as,

Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

This creates dysfunction because ministry should come from all members, not just one teacher. Mature believers must help weaker ones, contribute to the assembly, and serve both inside and outside the church.

Church discipline is not optional. It is necessary because assemblies are made of imperfect people. An assembly driven by correct doctrine must have procedures for correction—rebuke, admonition, and, if needed, separation. This is what distinguishes a true local church from a casual Bible study. A local church has direction, doctrine, and a mission, and therefore must guard itself from malfunction.

Paul teaches in 2 Timothy that God has given the church a structure for dealing with things when they go wrong. Because the church is made of imperfect people, malfunction is not rare—it is expected. Yet this is exactly where the church can shine, because its purpose is growth. Growth means improvement, and improvement means something in us must be corrected. If everyone were already perfect, there would be no reason to gather.

Ephesians 4:15 says we grow by “*speaking the truth in love.*” We come together because we share a common faith in Christ and a common trust in God’s Word.

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The local church should be the place where we learn what God wants, according to Scripture. Growth is sometimes painful, because God's Word defines His will and exposes where we are wrong. God is effectively "in a box"—a box of His own revealed Word. He cannot lie or sin. He cannot perform something contrary to or outside of His Word. His promises bind Him. So our growth must stay inside the boundaries of Scripture.

1 Thessalonians 3:12–13 shows Paul praying that believers increase and abound in love, and be established *"unblamable in holiness."* Unblamable does not mean sinless; it means nothing in our doctrine, conduct, or ministry gives cause for blame. But no one begins unblamable. Something blameworthy must be identified and corrected. That is what rebuke is—someone pointing out what needs improvement. People dislike rebuke, but anyone serious about growth should welcome it.

This is why church discipline exists. 2 Timothy 4:2 commands Timothy to *"preach the word... reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."*

Growth requires improvement, and improvement requires identifying error. If we attend a local church where nothing challenges us, nothing corrects us, and nothing pushes us toward maturity, we cannot grow. If we already know everything taught and already live everything taught, then we should be sent out to start another work.

The wrong response to error—whether in ourselves or in others—is to leave. Leaving avoids growth and abandons ministry. It says, *"I will not improve, and I will not help others improve."* The right response is to stay, submit to Scripture, and participate in the process of edification, sanctification, and service.

In the coming passages, we will look at when it is right to leave a church assembly and when it is wrong.

The local church exists because error exists. It exists because people need correction, encouragement, and truth. God's Word—not personal preference—is the standard. We do not ignore error, we do not accept error, and we do not quit because of error. Instead, we grow through discipline, rebuke, patience, and doctrine. This is how an assembly based on right doctrine functions, and how any local church remains faithful to Christ.

"Discipline" in Scripture has two sides: reprimand and training. Both reveal a person's character. Proverbs 9:8 says,

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Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.

The rebuke is the same—what differs is the heart receiving it. A scorner despises God's Word and hates correction. A wise man wants to do God's will, so he welcomes rebuke because it helps him grow.

This is why believers need a safe place—a church where mature, doctrinally sound people can offer rebuke in love. Rebuke is not cruelty; it is part of wisdom. Modern churches avoid discipline because they think love means never confronting error. But God's love is that we know His doctrine, be sanctified, and serve Him. Ignoring error is not love. Ephesians 4:15 says we must *"speak the truth in love."* Note we speak the truth in love, God's truth, from His Word, not our own ideas of the truth.

1 Corinthians 13 says charity *"rejoices in the truth"* and not in iniquity. True love hates sin because sin destroys people.

Many say, "God loves me just as I am." But "as you are" needs growth. Scripture exposes our thoughts and corrects us. Hebrews 4:12-13 says,

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Growth requires discomfort, correction, and sometimes pain. Discipleship is not just learning stories or virtues—it includes tearing down wrong thinking and replacing it with truth. Rebuke uproots false ideas so right doctrine can be planted.

Why do disciples resist discipline? Because rebuke hurts pride. Yet Paul *"glories in infirmities"* (Romans 12) because he knows trials produce strength. Likewise, we do not enjoy rebuke, but we value what it produces: maturity, stability, and usefulness to God.

Church discipline after Paul's pattern is not physical punishment, curses, or fines. Historically, churches beat people, cursed them, or sold indulgences. None of this is according to Paul. We are under grace, not law. We are ambassadors, not kingdom-builders. Our weapon is words, THE Word, not swords.

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Government bears the sword (Romans 13), not the church. Parents may use physical discipline (Proverbs), but the church does not. No church can place a believer under a curse, because Galatians 3 says Christ was made a curse for us. No pastor or priest can threaten damnation or remove salvation.

So what is discipline according to Paul?

It is rebuke, correction, admonition, and separation when necessary. It is confronting doctrinal error, confronting open sin, and restoring believers through truth. It is helping people grow into being *“unblamable in holiness”* (1 Thessalonians 3:13).

To be unblamable, something blameworthy must first be identified. Rebuke shows where improvement is needed.

A wise believer seeks rebuke because he wants to grow. A scorner hates rebuke because he refuses to change. Church discipline is simply the church helping believers grow through truth, correction, patience, and doctrine.

A local assembly has no authority to deny any spiritual riches we have in Christ. Everything we possess—justification, forgiveness, acceptance, heavenly blessings—is guaranteed by grace through the gospel. No elder, pastor, priest, or church can take these away. Christ alone is our Head. Many church assemblies abuse authority because they reject Paul’s pattern and treat the church as a building, or treat leaders as mediators between God and man. Holding to Paul’s doctrine protects us from this abuse.

There is authority in a local assembly—elders oversee order—but it is limited. It cannot touch our salvation or blessings. Discipline in a true local church is not about threatening salvation; it is about helping believers grow.

Discipline begins with instruction. We cannot grow without being taught our responsibilities as ambassadors of Christ. Discipline includes rebuke, which identifies something blameworthy. Rebuke is part of growth.

It includes admonition—gentle correction. Colossians 3:16 says we teach and admonish one another through songs. This means even our singing must reflect right doctrine. Wrong words in hymns shape wrong thinking. Music is a tool for teaching, not entertainment.

Discipline includes correction, as seen in the book of Galatians, where Paul confronts doctrinal error. And in rare cases, discipline includes rejection (Titus 3:10). If someone teaches false doctrine, is admonished twice, and refuses to stop, the assembly must separate from him. This is not removing him from Christ’s body. It is removing his influence so the church can function.

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Correction hurts, but it is necessary. People avoid churches that rebuke, yet rebuke is part of growth. You don't go to practice expecting the coach to say, "You're perfect." You expect correction so you can improve. The church assembly works the same way.

We gather for instruction, motivation, correction, and rebuke, so we can minister effectively outside the walls of wherever we assemble. Ephesians 4:15 says we grow by "*speaking the truth in love*." Truth sometimes hurts, but silence produces no growth. The difference between rebuke and cruelty is the motivation. Rebuke seeks improvement; cruelty seeks harm.

Church discipline is simply believers helping one another grow through truth, correction, patience, and love. It is essential for a functioning, faithful assembly.

The difference between harsh words and true rebuke is charity. 1 Corinthians 13:6 says charity "*rejoices in the truth, but not in iniquity*." Charity is patient, humble, and seeks the good of others. Real love wants to see truth working in someone, which means helping them grow. But before we can help others grow, we must first know the truth ourselves. Jesus' teaching about the mote in the eye shows that we cannot rebuke others if we refuse to deal with our own faults. Church discipline works the same way—mature believers help others grow because they have walked the same path.

Discipline—both personal and corporate—must come from God's Word. If Scripture is not taught fully, including the uncomfortable parts, discipline cannot happen. When ministers refuse to preach about sin, as is the case with so many ministers today, they fail their calling. The world says guilt is harmful, but Scripture says guilt is necessary. The law brings "*knowledge of sin*," and without knowing we are guilty, we cannot trust the gospel. Growth also requires guilt: we must see where we failed so we can improve and press forward.

2 Timothy 3:16 shows how God's Word disciplines us: doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction. The standard is Scripture, not personal opinion. If someone rebukes us, we check it against the Bible. If it is true, we submit to it because we want to do God's will. If it is not true, we stand on Scripture.

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Discipline also comes through those given responsibility in the assembly—elders, bishops, deacons, and *“those who are spiritual”* (Galatians 6). They restore those who fall. Paul calls himself a “father” to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 4:15), showing that discipline is part of spiritual parenting. Instructors give information; fathers give correction. Paul’s epistles—especially 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, and the Timothy letters—are full of rebuke because he loved the churches and wanted them to grow.

The tone of Galatians shows this clearly: *“O foolish Galatians.”* Paul is not being cruel; he is correcting them because they are going the wrong direction. Rebuke is part of apostolic care.

Proverbs 29:15 says *The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.*

Without correction, people follow sin because sin often looks pleasant. The church must teach discernment. Paul expresses this parental responsibility in 2 Corinthians 12:14: parents lay up for children, not the other way around. He tells the Corinthians he will not burden them but will provide what they need—correction, instruction, and care.

Church discipline is not about punishment; it is about growth. It is motivated by charity, not malice. Rebuke seeks improvement, not harm. Cruel words tear down; rebuke builds up. Discipline happens among people who trust one another, who share doctrine, and who gather to grow together in Christ. This is why the local church exists: to teach truth, expose error, encourage holiness, and help believers mature. Discipline—rooted in Scripture and motivated by love—is essential for that growth.

We just saw 2 Corinthians 12:14, where Paul says, *“the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.”*

Hidden inside this statement is a sharp rebuke. Paul is visiting Corinth for the third time, after years of teaching them right doctrine, and he still calls them children. Mature children eventually care for their parents, but young children cannot—they lack strength, discernment, and responsibility. Paul’s point is clear: the Corinthians are still spiritually immature. They cannot provide for him; he must still provide for them.

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In 2 Corinthians 12:15, he adds, *“I will very gladly spend and be spent for you.”*

This is like a parent who keeps giving even when the child insists, “I can do it myself.” Paul says he will continue to pour himself out because they are not yet able to stand on their own. He notes painfully, *“the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.”*

Only parents fully understand this. When you do what is truly good for someone—because God says it is good—and they love you less, it shows they lack discernment. They do not yet understand righteousness or what benefits them. This is how Paul describes the Corinthians, and how Scripture describes the unbelieving world: rejecting the truth that would give them peace, eternal life, and joy.

This is what rebuke looks like in Paul’s ministry. It is firm, clear, and rooted in love, and it comes from those who are spiritual—those who understand doctrine and have proven maturity. Children do not discipline parents. Likewise, immature believers do not rebuke elders.

1 Timothy 5:1 says, “Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father.” Elders have shown themselves blameless, doctrinally sound, and motivated by charity, not selfish gain. Their rebuke should be trusted because it aims at edification.

Elders are not infallible. 1 Timothy 5:19–20 explains how to deal with elders who sin: accusations require two or three witnesses, and if proven, the elder is rebuked publicly so all may fear. Elders must remain blameless.

Paul’s rebuke in 1 Corinthians 3:1–2 is blunt: *“I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.”* He tells them they cannot handle meat; they still need milk. This is strong correction, but it is necessary. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul confronts open sin directly: *“It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you... that one should have his father’s wife.”*

Everyone knew who he meant. He rebukes not only the sinner but the whole assembly: *“Ye are puffed up, and have not mourned.”*

Their failure to deal with sin was itself shameful. Corinth had no discipline, and Paul exposes it.

Paul’s shows that discipline is:

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- Clear — naming the issue plainly.
- Loving — motivated by charity, not malice.
- Doctrinal — rooted in truth, not personal opinion.
- Orderly — administered by elders, not by immature believers.
- Necessary — without it, churches remain childish and dysfunctional.

This is how a Paul-inspired assembly grows: through truth spoken in love, rebuke given by the mature, and a shared desire to become spiritually responsible adults in Christ.

Paul is explaining what real church discipline looks like and how it should work in a grace assembly.

Discipline is not about curses, beatings, or taking away salvation. The local church has no authority to remove any spiritual riches we have in Christ. Those are guaranteed by grace through faith in the gospel. Wrong patterns of discipline come from wrong doctrine—like treating the building as “the church” or treating the leader as a priest or mediator. We must hold to Paul's truth to avoid abuse of authority.

Biblical discipline has several forms:

- Instruction: You can't have discipline without sound teaching. The Bible—*all Scripture* (2Timothy 3:16)—is the tool God uses for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, so the man of God may be fully equipped for good works.
- Rebuke and admonition: Rebuke points out something blameworthy; admonition is a gentler form of rebuke. Even singing (Colossians 3:16) should teach and admonish with right words, not compromise doctrine.
- Correction: Whole epistles like Galatians exist to correct churches that have gone off course.
- Rejection: Titus 3:10 says a heretic, after first and second admonition, is to be rejected. This is not removing him from the Body of Christ, but from the local assembly so the church can function properly. If someone insists on teaching wrong doctrine and refuses correction, separation is necessary to protect the people (Romans 16:17; 2Timothy 2:16–18).

This hurts—no one likes correction, rejection, or rebuke—but growth requires identifying error. Like training with a good coach, we expect to be told where we need work. A church gathering is meant to be a place of growth, not comfort in error.

Blueprint for the Church

Discipline must be done by those who are spiritual and mature—elders, bishops, those proven blameless in doctrine and life (1 Timothy 3). Children don't discipline parents; likewise, immature believers shouldn't be the ones correcting elders. Yet elders themselves are not above discipline: if an elder sins, with two or three witnesses, he is to be rebuked before all so that others may fear (1 Timothy 5:19–20).

Paul's own epistles model this kind of discipline. He rebukes the Corinthians as “babes in Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:1–2), exposes open sin in their assembly (1 Corinthians 5:1–2), and commands them to put away the wicked person (1 Corinthians 5:13). He names false teachers like Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Timothy 2:17–18) so believers know whom to avoid. These two false teachers have carried that label for 2000 years.

So church discipline, according to Paul's pattern, is:

- Grounded in God's perfect Word
- Carried out by mature, spiritual leaders
- Aimed at spiritual growth, not control
- Willing to correct, and if necessary, to separate
- Always motivated by charity and commitment to the truth.

In Corinth, believers were boasting in “grace” and “liberty” while tolerating open sin. Paul rebukes them sharply because God hates sin, and their pride showed they had no discipline at all. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul says he has already judged the situation, even though he is absent. This is not hypocrisy—Scripture teaches that *“he that is spiritual judgeth all things”* (1 Corinthians 2:15). Jesus condemned hypocritical judgment, not righteous judgment.

The sin in Corinth was a behavioural malfunction, not merely doctrinal. A man was living in gross immorality, influencing others, and the church refused to mourn or separate from him. Paul commands them, in the name of Christ, to remove him from the assembly—*“deliver such an one unto Satan”* (1 Corinthians 5:5). This means sending him back into the world, the realm ruled by the “god of this world,” because he refuses to walk according to God's ways. Verse 13 explains it plainly: *“put away from among yourselves that wicked person.”*

Liberty does not mean celebrating sin. All things may be lawful, but not all things are fitting for the church's ministry. Sin destroys the assembly's witness and corrupts others. Separation protects the church and gives the sinner space to face consequences and hopefully repent.

Blueprint for the Church

Paul teaches the same principle in 2 Timothy 2:16–18. He says to shun profane and vain babblings because they produce ungodliness. He names Hymenaeus and Philetus, whose false teaching about the resurrection was overthrowing people's faith. Naming names is not unloving—it warns the people, clarifies truth, and gives the false teacher a chance to respond or repent. Separation is doctrinal, not personal. It does not declare someone unsaved; it simply protects the assembly's growth.

Believers also have the right to stand before Christ alone. If someone rejects correction and leaves, they still answer to the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ. No church can remove salvation or spiritual blessings.

2 Corinthians 7:8–11 shows the fruit of godly discipline. Paul's strong letter made the Corinthians sorry, but their sorrow led to repentance, not destruction. Godly sorrow produces carefulness, cleansing, indignation against sin, fear of God, zeal, and a desire to correct wrongs. Worldly sorrow produces only defensiveness and death.

Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians produced real change. He says the Corinthians *"proved themselves clear"* because they responded to correction with growth. His goal was not to punish the sinner or defend the victim, but to show his care for the whole church so they would live godly and maintain proper order.

True discipline:

- Judges sin righteously
- Protects the assembly
- Aims at repentance and restoration
- Is rooted in Scripture
- Is administered by mature believers
- Produces growth, not shame

This is how a Paul-inspired church stays healthy, holy, and effective in ministry.

2 Thessalonians 3:14–15 shows the heart behind discipline: if someone disobeys apostolic teaching, the church must *"note that man"* and have no company with him so he may be ashamed, yet *"count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."* Separation is never hatred; it is loving correction meant to bring repentance.

Blueprint for the Church

Growth happens when God's Word rebukes, corrects, and aligns believers with truth. When rebuke works, people clear themselves, repent, and grow. That is the purpose of church discipline.

All rebuke must aim at obedience to God. 2 Corinthians 2:4 shows Paul's heart: *"out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote... with many tears,"* not to grieve them but to show his abundant love. Discipline is not about power; it is about love that wants believers to walk in truth.

There is punishment in the local assembly—not punishment that removes salvation, but consequences that identify wrong and give opportunity for repentance. When the punishment has done its work, the church must forgive and comfort the repentant person so he is not *"swallowed up with overmuch sorrow"* (2 Corinthians 2:7). Discipline must always end with grace.

Paul urges the Corinthians to *"confirm your love toward him"* (2 Corinthians 2:8). True discipline produces change, and true local churches accept that change. It is hard for someone who has failed to return, and hard for others to forget past wrongs, but grace demands restoration. Believers will spend eternity together; therefore, forgiveness must be practised now.

Paul warns that refusing to forgive or refusing to restore is itself a failure of grace. Some believers separate from others permanently, calling them hateful or unworthy. Paul says instead: show grace, teach truth, and help them grow.

Paul tells the Corinthians that he wrote strongly to them so he could know whether the Corinthians were *"obedient in all things"* (2 Corinthians 2:9). Discipline tests the church's maturity. It gives opportunity to practice:

- Forgiveness
- Grace
- Restoration
- Commitment to truth*
- Walking in righteousness

Church discipline is never about removing someone from Christ. It is about protecting the assembly, correcting error, restoring the repentant, and strengthening the body.

Blueprint for the Church

Paul repeatedly warns believers not to let anyone rob them of their riches in Christ. No leader can take away salvation, blessings, liberty, or standing. Colossians 2 says, *"let no man beguile you of your reward."* 1 Timothy 4 says, *"let no man despise thy youth."* Colossians 2:16 says, *"let no man judge you... in holy days or Sabbaths."*

Knowing who we are in Christ protects us from leaders who misuse authority. Discipline must never threaten salvation or spiritual blessings. It must always follow Scripture, be done in love, and aim at growth.

The Local Church - Reasons to Stay and Leave

Perhaps you are struggling with whether you should stay in your church or leave. Maybe you don't know how to decide.

There are good reasons to leave your church assembly, and there are bad reasons. Here are some good reasons to exercise the feet God gave you and walk away.

Good Reasons to Leave

Different Doctrinal Beliefs

This first and most important reason to leave a church is when the name on the church sign does not include you.

If it says Baptist, and you are not a Baptist, then you should leave. It's not your party. By staying, you are creating dishonesty, drama, or division.

The ecumenical thinking minister says the worst reason to leave your church "family" is over doctrinal differences, but in reality it is the most important.

The function of a church is to grow together in the knowledge of the truth. If you cannot agree on what that is, then your future there is vain at best, or detrimental to your faith and integrity at worst.

Abuse or Misuse of the Bible

If you can't find a Bible in the church, it's time to scram.

If Bible study is not encouraged, taught, or practised, then move on.

If the pastor disparages, corrects, retranslates, or mocks God's preserved words, then they are not the kind of friends you need.

Is the Bible used for slogans, but applied out of context to try and "biblisis" the pastor's message? Beware and look for the exits. The Bible must be believed, given the highest authority, respected, and rightly divided.

Sin Is Not Mourned

Leaving at the first sight of sin in a church is a bad reason to leave. Churches should be able to minister to sinners. All have sinned, even people in church pews. Grace deals with sin.

Blueprint for the Church

However, when the church continues, encourages, or endorses sin, then it's time to look to the door. It should be obvious that grace does not give license to walk contrary to God (sin). When the church leadership does not recognise this, they are serving a different god than you.

The Gospel is Hidden

If your local church teaches the gospel as:

- ... asking Jesus into your life;
- ... a personal relationship with the Lord;
- ... making Jesus Lord of your life;
- ... sacrificing your all to Christ;
- ... repentance and confession;
- ... following Jesus;
- ... John 3:16;

... then they are hiding the light of the glorious gospel of Christ. The Bible describes this ministry, but it is not from the right god (2 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Sound Doctrine is Not a Priority

Does your pastor fail to answer simple questions such as:

Have you heard of the dispensation of the grace of God? (Ephesians 3:2)

Do you know what the mysteries of God are? (1 Corinthians 4:1-2)

Can you explain God's will? (1 Timothy 2:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:18)

When did the church begin and why is it important?

If the priority of your church assembly is to preach Christ and "if necessary use words", then it's time to take your leave. Not only is the pastor ignorant of the most important tasks of a faithful steward, but cannot preach Christ correctly, which is "according to the revelation of the mystery" (Romans 16:25).

More Money than ministry

When your local church talks more about money than ministry (evangelism & edification), then you have found yourself in a business, not a church.

Blueprint for the Church

When a group operates on the “customer is always right” business principle, then truth will be the first thing to leave, and you should lead the way.

In fact, the first mention of required tithing should be your cue to stand up and declare the liberty you have in Christ by walking out the door. You have found a church that teaches the law, and Christ has removed you from under it.

(Tithing is Israel’s law and places you under a curse; grace giving is the Pauline principle.)

Feeling Good and Motivation

If the priority of the local church you attend is to make people *feel* good and tries to provide a warm and fuzzy emotional glow inside, or preaches a self-motivation message about living your best life now and increasing your financial and material wealth. Leave! If the ministry is trying to copy the world's motivational masters and be "godly" Tony Robbins copies, or if they preach a "spiritual" form of Napoleon Hill's "Think and Grow Rich", you are in the wrong place spiritually.

Political Correctness

It is absolutely important that the laws governing an assembly, such as traffic laws or building laws, be adhered to. The local assembly should not be a congregation of civil lawbreakers. However, most political systems have ideological beliefs that infiltrate throughout a society. If your local church places these political views above the pure teaching of God's Word or tries to manipulate the Word into supporting a particular political viewpoint, you are not attending a place where the unadulterated truth of God is being taught, and you should leave.

You Are Not Looking for A Good Church

While these may be good reasons, perhaps you question whether these reasons are good enough.

After all, even though you disagree doctrinally, the people are nice and friendly. Though the Bible is rarely used, at least there is a sense of community and a warm environment that *feels* right. Besides, if the church took a position on certain sins or wrong teachings, then many would not feel welcome. And everyone knows the church needs money to keep the lights on, so who cares if they call it tithing or not... right?

Wrong.

Blueprint for the Church

If this is true of you, then you have just identified a good reason to leave a church: you are not looking for one. You want a nice, friendly social experience inside a friendly community that loves people more than God's righteousness and truth, and that is not a real church assembly.

A properly functioning church is where God's rightly divided word of truth is preached, practised, publicised, and prioritised as the pillar, and this will often cause some discomfort as it exposes the real person we are.

The Best Reason

If you are looking for a truly Bible-based church that rightly divides God's Word and teaches the mystery Gospel of Grace, you desire a good thing, but you may be the first to desire such a church in your area. Churches are built by people with just such a desire (1 Timothy 3:1).

The best reason to leave your church is to start one. The first step towards the right church is to leave the wrong one you're in.

Bad Reasons to Leave

The most popular reasons to leave a church are the worst ones. Why?

Most people who attend church do not know what to look for. Either they are unsaved and, as such, spiritually blind or spiritually immature and leave for carnal reasons. (If you are both saved and mature, then your reason to leave better be good.)

Leaving your church for a bad reason is much worse than just leaving.

So, what are the most popular worst reasons to leave a church?

Personalities

Church hoppers are known for being personality followers. It is now a cliché for people to leave saying “I didn’t like the pastor” as their reason.

Preachers have all sorts of personality flaws and idiosyncrasies, and when people are looking to follow a celebrity or a clique instead of compliment a body of believers, they will leave for the smallest personality differences.

Sometimes the best places to grow in ministry are filled with people of diverse and different personalities than you. Being like-minded does not mean being alike in personality.

If your church has people of different tastes, backgrounds, and ages than you, don’t let that get in the way of an opportunity to grow together in God’s word rightly divided (Colossians 2:19).

Environment

The first thing you see when entering a church is the building, pews, walls, smells, sounds, architecture. These are all good things to consider when buying a house, but horrible if they are the reason you are leaving your church. Know ye not, that a church is not the building!

Whether the building is old or new, and whether the atmosphere is musty, rusty, or chic should not matter. More important than the form is the function. What are they teaching and why?

If your reason to leave is that the people do not seem that friendly or the environment does not seem warm, you are focusing too much on the physical rather than the spiritual. (No, spiritual does not mean smells, bells, and stained glass windows.)

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Your Lifestyle

If you are leaving your church because your lifestyle does not fit well with the church's programs and activities, then you have stumbled upon a bad reason to leave.

If "there is nothing there that interests me" is the reason you are leaving a church, then it's time for a reality check. Are you interested in what God is doing? God is in the church building business.

It should not matter that the church does not have a youth gymnasium, PlayStations, a concert hall for the worship band, missions trips to warm places, and social gatherings for every generation and particular interest (e.g. Christian geeks, Christian mechanics, Christian cooks, Christian sports, Christian movies, etc.).

Church programs that serve your interest are not why God invented the Body of Christ. We come together in church because of a single common interest in doing and growing in the will of God rightly divided.

Sin

There you are sitting in church when suddenly you hear that someone is struggling with sin. What is your first response? Is it how can I help restore them? How can I encourage them to do right? How can I provide good spiritual counsel?

If your response is to just leave, then something is quite wrong. It should not be a shocking revelation that people in the church struggle with sin. If it is, then you are either weak in the faith or not in the faith. The gospel is of grace, and grace provides for sin, kills sin, and deals with sin. Grace is greater than sin, except, of course, to those who can't handle ministering to sinners (Romans 3:10; Romans 5:8) or to those who believe they themselves are sinless (Romans 3:23; Romans 5:12).

Doesn't the gospel of Christ minister toward sinners? An important duty in the church is to help each other put off sin by God's grace. The only time sin becomes a good reason to leave is when the church leadership does not deal with it, mourn it, forgive it, or oppose it.

By the way, if you are the one who is struggling with sin, the worst thing you can do is leave a church that knows and preaches the grace of God. You need to learn that *"where sin abounds, the grace of Christ much more abounds"* (Romans 5:20).

Blueprint for the Church

Music / Worship

“There is not enough praise and worship.” “It’s not my style of music.” “The songs did not move me.”

If this is the deal breaker for you staying in church, then you ought to consider the true function of music at church. God did not design church to be a concert hall, night club, or the entry level to your career as a professional musician.

Paul says singing in the church ought to teach and admonish the word of Christ. If the words matter so much to God, then apparently it is more honourable to sing old hymns out of tune with right doctrine than it is to sing world-class modern worship music filled with emotional pablum.

The church is not your spiritual juke box. Music ought to serve the function of communicating truth. Worship is your response to right doctrine, not whatever drives your flesh into an emotional frenzy or sentimental fervour.

Your Children

Many people decide to leave church because there is not a children’s ministry or youth group that their children enjoy.

Children also do not like doing schoolwork, cleaning their room, and eating vegetables. Do you need a church that lets the kids play, make a mess, and feeds them junk? That describes many, if not most, church assemblies in the Western world, and why for many parents a “better” church is just down the road.

Better than youth groups, playrooms, and pool tables would be classes that teach sound doctrine at an age-appropriate level.

Of all the immature reasons to leave a church, this has to be the most obvious. If your children are deciding what church you attend, then you need to rethink who is ruling the roost and how.

Grown children will stay in church when they get the gospel and sound doctrine when they were young, not because they were entertained.

Meeting Size

There is no reason more carnal than to leave a church because the meetings are too long. Does the living God only deserve so much time, which should always be shorter than a TV sitcom or a social media clip?

Blueprint for the Church

Some leave because the church is too small. If this is you, then you should reconsider what you are doing filling a pew in the first place. If it is to be served, then no doubt your personal hell is never having enough people to fill your needs. However, if it is to do service to God, where better than with a small group that values every member.

If a church that teaches the Bible rightly divided, gets the gospel right, and preaches Christ according to the mystery has only seven people, then you should be the eighth. Sometimes the reason churches do not grow is that people do not stay when they are small. Your presence matters.

If you require the church to be bigger, then perhaps it is you that is small, not the church.

Too Much Doctrine

The worst reason on this list of bad reasons to leave a church has got to be the complaint that the church is just too doctrinal, spends too much time on doctrine, or takes their doctrine too seriously.

Are you serious?

Are you serious for the Lord, or are you pretending? How could this ever be a reason to leave what is supposed to be the pillar and ground of the truth? However, it explains a lot when someone leaves for this reason. It exposes some of the real desires of that person.

The one thing people who are embedded in doctrinal immaturity cannot tolerate is too much doctrine. Especially if that doctrine is based on dispensational right division of the Word of Truth.

Leaving the Local Church Conclusion

The local church has the function of equipping us in God's will and His rightly divided Word. If a church is doing this, we have found the jackpot even if it is filled with odd, unlikable, smelly people who struggle with sin, songs, size, and study for long periods of time.

Summary

Church assemblies that preach sound doctrine, rightly divide the Word of truth and recognise Paul as our apostle for the age of grace we live in today cannot be found on every street corner. They are very, very hard to find.

Some churches have a little bit of what Paul talks about, while others have almost nothing. The majority of church assemblies today teach on Israel's programme and labour on the four gospels, believing their job today is bringing God's kingdom to earth.

So, why is it that the kind of church assembly we have talked about throughout this book is so rare today? Why can't we find a true Bible-based church that follows Paul's pattern?

The main reason is that people don't regard Paul's writings, or indeed the whole Bible, much anymore. The Bible is becoming ever less relevant to modern life.

So what we get is a man-made idea of how a human should view both his life's journey and what happens after. Not much of what is preached today is pure, unadulterated truth from God's word, rightly divided, and there is a constant mixing of dispensations where we, living today, are encouraged to follow instructions and doctrine which directly relate to other ages or dispensations. Confusion results.

For most of us who are believers and members of the Body of Christ, we're sure we need to be going to a church. After all, that's the Christian thing to do.

So, should we just go along to the local church, not really caring or just turning a blind eye to what they teach or do? It's actually going to church, so therefore I'm being obedient. That's not the case.

What we're being taught in church assemblies matters. Doctrine matters; in fact, it's all important to growth both personally and as the body of Christ. Man-devised programmes and doctrine that's preached in error actually swerve us away from growing in the knowledge of the truth.

So this book is just a guideline to show what a real Bible-based Paul-instructed church would look like, and if you can't find one, it may be that you yourself have to start one of these fellowships.

Blueprint for the Church

You don't have to be a pastor with a degree or a PhD or a piece of paper from a seminary; you just have to be scriptural; you have to know your Bible enough to steer away from the same error you are trying to avoid.

If you are struggling to find a local church that teaches the unadulterated Word of truth, rightly divided, and is structured according to our apostle in this age, Paul, and if you long to fellowship and both receive and pass on the knowledge of God from His Word with like-minded people, then you may need to pioneer a gathering in your local area.

On hearing that, your mind will probably immediately jump to pictures of you trying to get a building, advertising, standing before a crowd on a Sunday, and needing to come up with fresh sermons each week, etc., etc. NO!

This is not the church assembly you need to start!

You only need one other like-minded person to meet with regularly at your home, or their home, or in a coffee shop; it doesn't matter where. Your assembly may never grow past that one other person, and this is perfectly fine; it's still the church, the body of Christ, gathering together. And it still may be more in line with God's will, which is to have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4), than the massive building down the road with thousands of people attending.

If you were starting a local gathering today and you wanted to follow Paul's instructions, naturally, you would go to Paul's epistles for guidance as more people gradually arrive at your fellowship. They contain the instructions for the local church assembly today.

The very first step in starting a church fellowship is realising that the church is not a building or a business. You are not looking for a building; you are not looking for people to take the offices that we have described in this book; it's you personally knowing the mystery of Christ and being sound in doctrine and having the desire.

You will come up against people that disagree with what you have believed in your heart and what you see in the word; and you need to be able to handle it properly. You ask questions that expose the beliefs of others, and you refer back to Scripture. It always comes back to Scripture!

Blueprint for the Church

What does the word of truth say, rightly divided? It is not about what we think or feel. It's not about our personal opinions; it's not about what we *feel* is right or what we think *might* be right. It's what does the Word of God say? We must know that. We must be able to communicate that and drag people's thinking back to the Word.

And it may be necessary when we're discussing that with people to go right back to what the Bible actually is.

Do they even believe that the Bible is the unadulterated Word of God?

If a person doesn't believe that, well, anything goes; and to them there is no source of absolute truth. If you discard the Bible, everything is just man's idea. What about the Pope? What about the minister at the local church? Maybe *they* have the authority.

Okay, well, where did they *get* that authority? What is the basis for what they are speaking about? Where does that supposed truth come from?

In fact, we can even go one step further back and say, well, do you believe that God even exists? Do you believe that He is the creator of heaven and Earth? Do you believe that He created man, and that He left a clear and concise message explaining His plan and His will to the man He created?

If the person you're talking to or debating with doesn't believe these fundamentals, then anything goes. Atheism, evolutionism, Buddhism, Harry Krishna, whatever it is they feel and think goes because they have no reference point to truth, and so sometimes it may be that you have to get people back to that realisation of what the Bible is and who God himself is before introducing doctrine.

We are making a big assumption in writing this book. We are assuming that we are writing to people who believe that God exists and that He is the Creator of heaven and earth and man in his own image. We are assuming that you believe that He's given a message, an integrated message, to Mankind and that message is the Bible, and that the message is uncorruptible and is given to us to explain His plan and His purpose, not just for you or for me, but for the entire universe. If you do not believe all that, then this book is not going to be of any use to you at all.

Blueprint...

"Blueprint for the Church" challenges conventional notions of church gatherings, advocating for a biblical model that emphasizes the living body of Christ working together in love and truth. It explores the vital role of community in spiritual growth, encouraging believers to gather for mutual encouragement, correction, and the dissemination of sound doctrine. This book serves as a guide for those seeking to establish or participate in authentic, scripture-based fellowships that prioritize Christ's teachings and the mystery of the gospel.