

The Corporate Nature of the Christian Life

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[0 : 00] all believers are under obligation to join themselves to local churches when and where they have opportunity to do so. In other words, it's not the will of Christ the head for his believers to fly solo to heaven.

Rather, that they be joined together in mutual commitment to each other and to the Lord in these local churches. So the Bible makes it plain that the Christian life is not something we do on our own. It's not a do-it-yourself project, but it's to be developed and lived out within the fellowship of a local church of believers. And this central role of the local church in the believer's life should be obvious just from the fact that most of the letters of the New Testament are written to local churches, aren't they?

That means that what God has to say to us, he says to us as local churches or to pastors and leaders of local churches, instructing them on local church life, such as Timothy's, and 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus, and so on.

And then there's the 22 one-anotherings that we find in the New Testament, commands that assume that we are in a fellowship where these one-anotherings can be applied, organized local churches.

[1 : 28] Well, why this New Testament emphasis on local church membership and the corporateness of Christianity is so neglected today is not something I'm going to seek to answer this afternoon.

My interest is rather to appreciate the wisdom and goodness of God in seeing each believer joined to one of these local churches.

Just four points. The first is we're dangerous when alone. The image of sheep without a shepherd is something that's found in the Bible at least a half a dozen times, and nowhere is it a good situation that's being envisioned.

It's always a pitiful condition to be in, to be sheep without a shepherd. We need Christ's shepherds to watch over us. We need each other to help, comfort, encourage, exhort, correct, spur on to sanctification and for our protection.

I wonder if you've ever seen these videos of migrating packs of animals in Africa. Which animals in the pack become the next meal for the predators?

[2 : 41] It's always those who are lagging behind, isn't it? Who are cut off from the safety of the herd. Well, in the same way, sheep without shepherds, sheep without the flock tend to fare no better spiritually.

And so the command is not to neglect the gatherings of the churches. Some are in the habit of doing. We need to be in the pack of Christ's disciples.

In Deuteronomy 25, 17, we read these words from the Lord. Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt.

When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind. We get weary and worn out on the journey.

That's the fact. They were just coming out of Egypt in the great exodus and they got weary and worn out and the Amalekites attacked and cut off all who were lagging behind.

[3 : 44] And so because we're dangerous when alone, Christ has called his sheep to travel to heaven in packs for our own good and for the good of others we journey with. That's the first reason to appreciate the central place of the local church in the life of every believer.

Secondly, it's in the context of local church life that the graces of the Christian life are called into practice and develop. We're to grow in grace.

Well, what context should that take place in? Roman Catholicism got it wrong when they sent their nuns and monks into the isolations of their cloisters and monasteries to grow in greater holiness and to be more spiritual.

No, it was to the local church in Rome that Paul writes in Romans 12, 10 and following, be devoted to one another there in the local church in Rome. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. That grows in the church, in the context of the church. Honor one another above yourselves because in the local church, our ideas might collide and we will have need to honor one another above ourselves.

[4 : 58] Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn. You see, the practice field for all of those graces is the local church.

Live in harmony with one another. Harmony cannot happen with one note, can it? Tom? No. You need more than one note to get harmony.

And so it is, again, in the local church that we have many notes and they are to be struck in harmony together. We're to learn to make good music to our Lord together as we live with each other in harmony.

So all the Christ-like graces are not learned in isolation from people. It's in the togetherness of the local church that these graces are desperately needed and are often called into exercise and developed.

Muscles only grow when there's some kind of resistance applied, whether it's weights or isometrics. Some kind of resistance needs to be applied if the muscle is to grow.

[6 : 12] And the same is true of growth in the social graces of the Christian life. Some kind of resistance is needed to grow in those graces. And so, again, it's to the local church in Colossae that Paul writes in Colossians 3.12.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Again, it's the local church that provides the context for these social graces of the Holy Spirit.

Patience. That's never needed, except in situations where your patience is tried.

Right? Your brothers and sisters in Christ will give you that opportunity here in the local church. If you haven't found that out, you've not been here long enough, patience grows when our patience is tried, and the local church is the place to exercise patience.

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another, he says to the church. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Where do you need to learn forbearance?

[7 : 24] Where something is irritating you and you have to bear with it. Where do you need to forgive? Well, when there are grievances that come up between you and someone else, and no one is without sin in the local church, this one included.

And so our sins and our faults often will splash on to one another, presenting exactly the situation, exactly the climate in which we need to grow in our forbearance and forgiveness, in patience and gentleness as we deal with each other in our remaining sin.

Well, you'd almost think that Christ designed the local church in this way on purpose, to be a place where these graces will be tried, where they'll be needed, where they'll be called into action and exercise, all so that we might grow in grace and in this love for one another.

And of course, that is precisely the case. The local church is the intentional design of our all-wise God to be the nursery for growing in grace.

That's why it's Christ's will for every disciple of his to belong to a local church. And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

[8 : 46] Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body, you are called to peace. And be thankful. A third reason to appreciate the wisdom and goodness of God is that the local church is the place where the spiritual gifts are found in operation.

These are those supernaturally empowered abilities given by God to everyone in the body. For your profit, for your edification, for your growth and Christ-like maturation.

1 Corinthians 12, 7. Now to each one, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. You see what he's saying? Each one of you have been given grace, spiritual gifts, for the common good, for the good of all.

And so just like a body, a physical body, the body's a unit, though it is made up of many parts. And though all its parts are many, they form one body.

And God has so arranged the parts of the body that we're mutually dependent upon one another.

So the eye needs the hand, the head needs the feet, and so on and so on.

[10:09] So we're not given everything we need directly from Christ to us. We might think that. All I need is just me and Jesus and my Bible. No, that's not what Jesus says.

He says, some of the good that you need, I will send to her, to him, and through them to you. I will give them gifts to minister to your edification.

And so he's made us mutually dependent on each other. We don't all have the same gifts. We don't all have all the gifts. We don't all have the grace we need. We find it in Christ, but we find it through his means of grace and through the channels of grace.

And he has brought us into a body, and it's in the body of Christ that spiritual gifts are given for the mutual edification of each part, and indeed, so that the whole will work together smoothly.

So, to remain aloof from the local church is to remain aloof from what I need to grow. So, that's the third. And then, fourth, membership in a local church gives us the benefit of belonging, of being accepted by the family of God.

[11:22] And I think this is something that the world is craving. We see it in many ways, the breakdown of belonging to a family, to someone that loves us, to a group of people who love us.

Just neighborliness is being lost in community, sense of belonging. It's a world where we don't belong, especially for us Christians.

We feel that. This isn't our home. And we don't belong here. And our laws and the mockery and the canceling and persecution of us is making us feel that more and more, isn't it?

That we sense we don't belong here. And since we're hated there in the world, we need to experience God's love and belonging here, in the midst of the local church, a place where our hearts are at home, where we sense, these are my people.

I belong here. I have the most important things in common with these people.

[12:35] So God's word to believers in the local church in Rome, chapter 15 and verse 7, is accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you in order to bring praise to God.

Rejected out there by the world, accepted here in the local church. Wonderful thing to be accepted. The weak find strength, the afflicted find grace when we offer the blessing of belonging.

And so there's many more ways that God's good plan of the local church in our lives is seen as an indispensable blessing, but the highest blessing of all is fifthly, that in the local churches, God's glory is especially put on display.

That's why we say that all of this might be done to the end that Christ would be glorified in his church because it is in the church. The church is the one place where his glory is set on display today above any other place.

Obviously, the cross of Christ was the great display, but I'm saying as far as a place to go and to see something, it's the church where his glory is displayed. Ephesians 3.10, his intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[14:04] These rulers and authorities, the angelic world is gawking as they're looking at the church and seeing the wisdom of God and bringing to pass his plan of salvation through the work of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 3.20, now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Jesus Christ throughout all generations forever and ever.

Amen. You remember in the Old Testament, God's glory was made known in the tabernacle and the temple, wasn't it? The Shekinah glory shone forth from the temple. Well, you are the temple now.

The church of Jesus Christ and here his presence is shining out. His glory is seen in his church. So much is happening in the church that brings him glory.

It's here that we just saw that his disciples are being transformed into his image, which is very much to his glory. To have a whole group of brothers and sisters made in the image of their elder brother, Jesus Christ.

[15:18] That's glorifying to God and it's here that we are demonstrating more and more of the graces of Jesus Christ that are a wonderful praise to his name.

Here, we're accepting one another in Christ with all of our differences just as he accepted us in order to bring praise to God.

And so all of this, you see, redounds to the praise of God. And that's what Jesus was praying on the night he was betrayed in John 17, 21 to 23, that, Lord, that all of them may be one.

And, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us so that the world may believe that you sent me. May they be perfected into one to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

And so as a world that lives in a context of hating and being hated, as Titus teaches us, this loving unity in the church shines out. The more hatred in the world, the more our love and unity want for each other, shines out into this world of darkness.

[16:29] The incredible truth that God has so loved us that he sent his son in the world to save us from that kingdom of darkness and to bring us into the kingdom of the son he loves.

That's the kingdom of darkness and hatred. This is the kingdom of love and of light. What is it that can bring a people together in loving unity in the church?

It's the love of God for us in Christ that has made us lovers of him and lovers of one another. That is to the great praise and glory of our God, a powerful witness to the world.

Well, I trust all of these reasons show us just how wise and good our God is in planting us into a local body of believers.

believers and we trust with all these eight that have joined us today that we can more and more live in such a way as to bring honor to the name of Christ and spread his kingdom near and far.

[17:36] from the Lord. The miring Deborah is at his 39-year-old and we'll be in this promise He before Amen. William He is put that He no He what does only but the world he is for EPA