

Lesson 1 - The Local Church and Your Spiritual Future

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Introduction: Why is the choice of a local church so important?

A. God has created us as social creatures. We are greatly influenced by our relationships! (**Prov 12:3-5, 26; Ps 1:1-2**)

1. The most important decision outside of becoming a Christian is the choice of a mate. Your spiritual future will be greatly impacted. (**1 Pt 3:7**)
2. The choice of a local church falls in this type of a decision.
3. Becoming part of a local church ought to create many new and close relationships! (**1 Cor 12:25-27**)

B. Local churches are a key provision given by God for our growth.

1. The function of a shepherd is uniquely found in a local church. (**1 Pt 5:1-4**)
2. This is God's provision to help us grow and be faithful.
3. Some flocks may be led in the wrong path by unfaithful shepherds.
4. Our goal is to find a local church that truly has Christ as their head!

I. Making the right choice of a local church requires spiritual maturity

A. A mature Christian has learned to discern and seek what God wants. (**Rom 12:1-2**)

1. When our hearts are seeking "that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" then we will empty ourselves and desire to truly be taught!
2. The immature may not have yet learned to put away selfish desires or even learned how to read and apply scripture personally.
3. The immature can be swayed by emotion and deception of men. (**Eph 4:14-15**)

B. Many elements of the doctrine of Christ are only practiced within local churches!

1. The assembly involves a collective worship. (**1 Cor 14:26, 11:20, 23-24**)
2. Local churches observe the Lord's Supper. (**Acts 2:42**)
3. Local churches have a weekly collection for the Lord's work. (**1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 11:8**)
4. God gave instructions to appoint elders and deacons! (**1 Tim 3; Acts 14:23**)
5. There are many other instructions that uniquely apply to local churches.
6. All will be greatly challenged to discern these and other important issues!

II. The kind of choice we make will reveal our own hearts

A. Jesus often taught that our response to His words reveal if we really love Him. (**Jn 3:19-21; Jn 14:15, 21, 23-24**)

1. Our discernment is a process that takes time! We should be in a local church that openly gives emphasis to discernment and change!
2. When I made the commitment to follow Jesus as my Lord as I learned more about the Lord's will I tried to both discern and stand on what I found!

B. I would seek to find a church that believed God's word was inspired and complete!

1. Most local churches within "mainstream Christianity" have rejected this truth. (**2 Tim 3:16-17**)
2. Churches that do not have this foundation cannot stand on anything. If Jesus is a risen Lord then His word is perfect! (**Eph 1:22-23; 2:20**)

- C. I would seek to find a church *that taught and defended* God's plan of salvation!
1. Jesus placed baptism as *a foundational doctrine* for all Christians. **(Eph 4:4-6)**
 2. Paul indicated that all Christians were brought into fellowship with Christ and His blood *at the point of baptism*. **(Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:26-27)**
 3. This was a very real personal choice I had to make.
- D. Many have substituted their loyalty for God for loyalty with other things. Consider some common substitutions. **(Luke 6:46-49)**
1. *Loyalty to a church* - Often church traditions and church doctrines will not be given up or even be tested by a study of the Bible.
 2. *Loyalty to a man* - Sometimes devotion to a famous preacher, a close friend, or a famous editor causes one to refuse to test or go against their teachings.
 3. *Loyalty to family* - Many simply follow in the way they were raised without a willingness to test their religion. In some cases if the family makes a change, loyalty to the family means following without question.
 4. *Loyalty to self* - Without question this is the most common loyalty that keeps men from listening to God. Study and change is time consuming, often emotionally draining, and requires strong faith and love for God and His word. There is outright hostility towards any teaching that challenges! **(2 Tim 4:3-4)**

III. Our future and our eternity must involve a path that draws us closer to God

- A. God's way will *provide for each succeeding generation*. **(Acts 2:38-39; 1 Tim 6:20-21)**
1. It requires that *men will give themselves "entirely"* to teaching these entrusted words. This dedication does *not come from a lukewarm faith*. **(1 Tim 4:15-16; 2 Tim 2:2)**
 2. *Laziness and the fear of conflict* will destroy a local church. **(Rev 3:15-16)**
 3. Do we not realize that *our children and see the difference* between conviction and convenience?
- B. A commitment to *faithfully teach without compromise* will result in a proper fellowship!
1. Those who claim to have such a commitment to grace and love often *have a sudden change* when the word is boldly preached. **(Mt 15:12-14)**
 2. When *the pulpit and the class is restricted from open teaching of God's word* then God's fellowship has been discarded.
 3. How can the next generation *find faith and a good conscience*? **(1 Tim 1:3-5, 6-7, 18-19; 4:1-2; 2 Tim 2:13)**

Questions

1. Why is the choice of a local church so important?
2. How do relationships affect us spiritually?
3. Why is the discernment needed to choose a church so challenging?
4. What teachings given by the Lord and His apostles can only be obeyed within a local church?
5. What are some elementary doctrinal questions that need to be asked about any local church?
6. How does a worldly man approach the question of what local church to choose?
7. Why do local churches and their members change over time? Answer this from both the standpoint of good changes and bad changes!

Supplement: Historical Divisions follow a common path!

- A. Consider the Christian church and the contrast with churches of Christ in the early 1900's.
1. There was a time both groups were committed to standing on the Bible as the sole guide in all things.
 2. In time two very different attitudes towards the Bible developed.
 3. Not only did the outward practices change but the attitude towards open study and discussion changed.
 4. These changes in attitudes (hearts) in time affected every area of doctrine!
- B. Let us examine an article written by Floyd Decker written in 1944. This article is not proof concerning right or wrong but it does show the changes that have occurred over time.
1. Without proper definitions of terms there are many things in this article that needs additional explanation to be understood!
 2. This article can be a tool in our current studies to build a foundation so that we can discern in applications mentioned in the article.

"WHY I LEFT THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH"
Floyd A. Decker (1944)

1. "The Christian Church has women Counselors, Directors, and Lecturers; the church of Christ does not **(I Tim 2:11,12; I Cor. 14:34)**.
2. The Christian Church has Educational Directors, Associate Ministers and Youth Directors; the church of Christ has elders, deacons, evangelists and teachers **(Eph. 4:11; Phil 1:1)**.
3. The Christian Church has Missionary, Benevolent, and Educational Organizations to execute the work of the church; the church of Christ does not. **(Eph 4:4;3:10,21)**.
4. The Christian Church celebrates days of heathen worship, such as Easter, Mother's Day, and Christmas; the church of Christ does not **(Gal. 4:10)**.
5. The Christian Church fellowships various denominations in their activities, leaving the impression that all are brethren; the church of Christ does not. **(Rom 1:16; 2 Jn. 9-11; Gal 1:6-10)**.
6. The Christian Church seeks to get crowds with Youth Meetings, Campaigns for Christ, Rallies, Drives and Promotions; the church of Christ does not. **(Rev. 22:18,19)**.
7. The Christian Church emphasizes society and the physical man by appealing to the carnal nature--with church carnivals, bands, plays, choruses, dramatics, church kitchens, church camps, and elaborate fellowship halls; the church of Christ does not. **(I Cor. 10:7; 11:22-34; Rom 14:17)**.
8. The Christian Church elevates its preachers above the rest of the members by using such titles as Pastor, Superintendent, President, Doctor, and Reverend; the church of Christ does not **(Matt. 23: 5-12)**.
9. The Christian Church takes up collections at services other than on the first day of the week, and uses unscriptural means such as suppers, property rentals, and special collections to raise money for the church; the church of Christ follows **I Cor. 16:1,2** by having each member lay by in store on the first day of the week. This is the only way of raising money.
10. The Christian church misuses the name "Christian" (a noun) by speaking of "Christian nations", "Christian schools", and the "Christian Church"; the church of Christ does not **(Acts 11:26; 26:28; I Pet 4:16)**.
11. The Christian Church owns and operates publishing houses, radio stations, hospitals, and other Benevolent Societies; the churches of Christ build nothing but churches **(Eph. 3:21)**.
12. The Christian Church owns, supports, and operates schools for secular education, beginning with kindergartens and going all the way through theological seminaries; the church of Christ does not **(I Tim 3:15)**.
13. The Christian Church has a compromising attitude and spirit, will not defend its doctrine, is nothing but a man-made denomination, has no regard for the authority of the Bible, bases its practice on the silence of the Scriptures, and appeals to the traditions of the elders rather than the simple unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ. The Christian Church is no part of the NT church, and should not be regarded as a friend of Christ nor of the truth."

Contrasting Churches **By Sewell Hall**

Local churches may be led either by godly or by not-godly men—that is, by men who are most concerned for God and things of the Spirit or by men whose concerns are primarily human and temporal. Such churches can be distinguished by the following: Goals: Godly leaders have as their goal "the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ" (Eph. 4:12-15). Ungodly men have as their primary goal increasing numbers—a big church. They consider numerical growth proof of God's approval.

Doctrine: Godly leaders are determined to abide in the doctrine of Christ and not to go beyond it (2 John 9). Not-godly men, knowing that most of the public "will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4), provide the teachers that will tickle their ears.

Discipline: Godly leaders will insist that in harmony with God's instructions the church "withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly" (2 Thess. 3:6). Not-godly leaders advertise: "Come as you are" and boast that they are not judgmental, receiving everyone regardless of lifestyle.

Worship: Godly leaders insist that God be worshiped "acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28) while not-godly men place great emphasis on "worship" that pleases the public and seem concerned only that everyone leave "feeling good about themselves" and eager to return.

Preachers: Godly leaders are not nearly as concerned with excellence of speech or of wisdom as that preachers be "determined not to know anything ... save Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:1-2). Not-godly leaders insist that preachers be entertaining and personally popular, even with the world.

Activities: Godly leaders test every proposed action by the scriptures, determined to "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17) while not-godly leaders offer whatever people want—sports, entertainment, education, feasts, travel—with little apparent concern for what God wants.

What kind of church are you seeking—the church of your choice or the church of God's choice?