

# The Local Church

by Pastor Bob Bolender

## Introduction and Definition [1]

A local church is an **ἐκκλησία** (ekklesia), a corporate body of individuals assembled together for a specific purpose.

In contrast to the Church Universal, a local church is a church “in” or “at” a specific geographical location.

### Local Churches Named in the Bible

#### At Jerusalem

##### Acts 11:22

Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the **church** which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

##### Acts 15:4

And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the **church**, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them

#### At Antioch

##### Acts 13:1

Now there were in the **church** that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

#### At Caesarea

##### Acts 18:22

And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the **church**, he went down to Antioch.

#### In Ephesus

##### Acts 20:17

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the **church**.

##### Revelation 2:1

Unto the angel of the **church** of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

#### At Cenchrea

##### Romans 16:1

I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the **church** which is at Cenchrea:

[Try to locate Cenchrea on a map of Bible times. wd]

**At Corinth****1 Corinthians 1:2**

Unto the **church** of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

**2 Corinthians 1:1**

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the **church** of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:

**In Galatia****1 Corinthians 16:1**

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the **churches** of Galatia, even so do ye.

**Galatians 1:2**

And all the brethren which are with me, unto the **churches** of Galatia:

**In Asia****1 Corinthians 16:19**

The **churches** of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the **church** that is in their house.

**In Macedonia****2 Corinthians 8:1**

Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the **churches** of Macedonia;

**Of Judea****Galatians 1:22**

And was unknown by face unto the **churches** of Judaea which were in Christ:

**1 Thessalonians 2:14**

For ye, brethren, became followers of the **churches** of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:

**Saints in Philippi and Colossae****Philippians 1:1**

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

**Colossians 1:1,2**

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother,

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colossae: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Of the Laodiceans****Colossians 4:16**

And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the **church** of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

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**Of the Thessalonians****1 Thessalonians 1:1**

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the **church** of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**2 Thessalonians 1:1**

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the **church** of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

**In Smyrna****Revelation 2:8**

And unto the angel of the **church** in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

**In Pergamum****Revelation 2:12**

And to the angel of the **church** in Pergamus write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

**In Thyatira****Revelation 2:18**

And unto the angel of the **church** in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;

**In Sardis****Revelation 3:1**

And unto the angel of the **church** in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

**In Philadelphia****Revelation 3:7**

And to the angel of the **church** in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

The phrase “the flock of God among you” refers to local churches. In addition to the geographical identity of a local church, the New Testament denotes the pastoral identity of a local church.

**Acts 20:28**

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the **church** of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

**1 Peter 5:1,2**

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

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## Of What Does a Local Church Consist?

### Christian Believers (Saints)

#### 1 Corinthians 14:33

For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all **churches** of the saints.

#### Philippians 1:1

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

At a minimum, a local church would have a shepherd (elder, overseer, pastor-teacher), and any number of “sheep”.

As a local church grows, servant helpers (deacons) and additional elders will be appointed.

#### 1 Timothy 3:1-15

#### Titus 1:5-9

#### Acts 6:1-6

A local church is NOT a building, a place, or an activity. It IS an [organized] body of believers structured as a flock.

## Development and Application - Top-Down versus Bottom-Up Organization

### Top-Down Orientation

The top-down model is seen in every organizational structure in the Bible. Here are several examples.

1. The Trinity itself positions God the Father at the “top”, delegating responsibilities “down” to God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.
2. The angelic realm of creation exhibits a rank structure of rulers, authorities, and powers. This indicates a top-down orientation.
3. The institutions of Marriage, Family, and Nations were all created with a top-down orientation. Chains of command are clearly defined, and all authority is delegated authority from God Himself.
4. The Levitical Priesthood positioned the singular High Priest at the top of the organization. The High Priest delegated responsibilities down to other multiple priests and Levites.
5. The Throne of David positioned the singular king at the top, and delegated responsibilities down to the multiple Royal Princes, and the multiple Tribal Princes.
6. The Incarnation Ministry positioned the singular Jesus Christ at the top, and delegated responsibilities down to the multiple disciples / apostles.
7. The Apostolic Age of the Dispensation of the Church positioned singular Apostles at the top, with responsibilities delegated to multiple elders and deacons below them.
8. The Lampstand Age of the Dispensation of the Church positions singular Star / Angel Messengers at the top, with delegated responsibilities to multiple fellow elders and deacons.

### Bottom-Up Orientation

The Bottom-Up Model of organization is consistently seen in the Bible as associated with rebellion and evil.

The Spies at Kadesh-Barnea

#### Numbers 13:25 to 14:10

The Jews Demand for a King

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**1 Samuel 8:1-22**

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ

**Matthew 27:15-26**

The release of Satan for Gog/Magog

**Revelation 20:3, 7-10**

## **Development and Application – The Local Church as Developed in the New Testament**

### **ACTS**

The foundation for local churches is laid in Acts. The four-fold priorities for local church activity are established.

**Acts 2:42**

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' (1) doctrine and (2) fellowship, and in (3) breaking of bread, and in (4) prayer.

In Acts, the principle was established for providing needed **service** to prevent **ministry neglect**.

**Acts 6:1-6**

In Acts, a basis is established for both the autonomy of a local church and for cooperation among local churches.

**Acts 11:27-30****Acts 14:26****Acts 15:2 ff**

### **EPISTLES**

The epistles describe the function of spiritual gifts for the edification of the Body.

**Romans 12:3-8****I Corinthians 12:1-31****1 Peter 4:7-11**

Priorities are set which promote order, not confusion.

**1 Corinthians 14:1-40**

In the epistles we see the spiritual gifts distributed to provide leadership in local churches.

**Ephesians 4:11-16**

There is seen in the epistles a transition from apostolic authority to elder leadership in local churches, including the appointment of additional elders.

**1 Timothy 3:1-15****Titus 1:5-9****2 Timothy 2:2**

### **REVELATION**

Here is the last word on ecclesiology, the preparation for the post-apostolic ages of the Church.

**Revelation 1:11, 19**

11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and

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send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamus, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

19 Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;

## **Certain Problems**

### **Problems with a denominational approach**

There is no New Testament basis for a human organizational structure that includes multiple local churches. No local church is subject to any other local church or to a denominational structure.

Peter was not the Rock upon which the church was to be built.

#### **Matthew 16:18**

Jesus Christ walks in the midst of each and every lampstand, and every single star is held in His right hand.

#### **Revelation 1:20**

### **Problems with a Congregational Approach**

The pastor is accountable to the Chief Shepherd, not to the flock.

#### **Ezekiel 34:1-10**

#### **1 Peter 5:4**

The pastor is to rule the flock, not be ruled by the flock.

#### **1 Corinthians 16:16**

#### **1 Thessalonians 5:12**

#### **Hebrews 13:17**

#### **1 Peter 5:3**

### **Problems with a Tyrannical Approach**

God hates the deeds and teachings of the Nicolaitans.

#### **Revelation 2:6,15**

The shepherd may be the head of the local body, and charged with its rule, yet he is still a part of the local body and subject to applicable church discipline.

#### **1 Corinthians 12:21-26**

#### **Romans 12:3-5**

## **Elders – Overseers – Pastors – a Political Study in Ecclesiology**

The Greek words which refer to the office of **Elder** are the following:

**πρεσβύτερος** (presbuteros): “elder of age”; “elder of office”; used in both Jewish and Church applications.

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**Matthew 15:2; 16:21; 21:23; 26:3,47,57; 27:1,3,12,20,41; 28:12**

**Mark 7:3,5; 8:31; 11:27; 14:43,53; 15:1**

**Luke 7:3; 9:22; 15:25; 20:1; 22:52**

**John 8:9**

**Acts 2:17; 4:5,8,23; 6:12; 11:30; 14:23; 15:2,4,6,22,23; 20:17; 21:18; 23:14; 24:1; 25:15**

**1 Timothy 5:1,2,17,19**

**Titus 1:5**

**Hebrews 11:2**

**James 5:14**

**1 Peter 5:1,5**

**2 John 1**

**3 John 1**

**Revelation 4:4,10; 5:5,6,8,11,14; 7:11,13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4.**

**πρεσβυτέριον** (presbuterion): “presbytery”; “council of elders”.

**Luke 22:66**

**Acts 22:5**

**1 Timothy 4:14**

**συμπρεσβύτερος** (sumpresbuteros): “fellow elder”.

**1 Peter 5:1**

Terminology for the office of **Overseer**:

**ἐπίσκοπος** (episkopos): “overseer”

**Acts 20:28**

**Philippians 1:1**

**1 Timothy 3:2**

**Titus 1:7**

**1 Peter 2:25**

**ἐπισκοπέω** (episkoepo): “to oversee; to look after; to care for”

**Hebrews 12:15**

**1 Peter 5:2**

**ἐπισκοπή** (episkope): “oversight”

**Luke 19:44**

**Acts 1:20**

**1 Timothy 3:1**

**1 Peter 2:12**

The title or work of **Pastor** is seen in the following Greek terms:

**ποιμήν** (poimen): “shepherd; pastor”

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Matthew 9:36; 25:32; 26:31

Mark 6:34; 14:27

Luke 2:8,15,18,20

John 10:2,11,12,14,16

Ephesians 4:11

Hebrews 13:20

1 Peter 2:25

**ποιμαίνω** (poimaino): “to feed; to shepherd; to rule”

Matthew 2:6

Luke 17:7

John 21:16

Acts 20:28

1 Corinthians 9:7

1 Peter 5:2

Jude 12

Revelation 2:27; 7:17; 12:5; 19:15

**ποίμνη** (poimne): “flock”

Matthew 26:31

Luke 2:8

John 10:16

1 Corinthians 9:7

**ποίμνιον** (poimnion): “flock”

Luke 12:32

Acts 20:28,29

1 Peter 5:2,3

## Polity in the Dispensation of the Church

### Age of the Apostles

Note: the Dispensation of the Church is the period of the present administration of the plan and program of God on earth. The Dispensation of the Church is divided into two ages: The Age of the Apostles and The Age of the Local Church. The Age of the Apostles was foundational and transitional for the Age of the Local Church.

The phrase “**apostles and prophets**” refers to the *foundational* stage of the present dispensation.

The new age of Jews and Gentiles united in one Body is the blessing of this present dispensation.

The church is being built as a temple in the Lord.

Church Age doctrine is “mystery” doctrine; that is, doctrine not previously revealed, but reserved for the ministry of the apostles and prophets.

**Ephesians 2:20; 3:5**

The phrase “**apostles and elders**” refers to the *transitional* stage of this present dispensation.

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Prior to the apostles spreading throughout the world, there was a plurality of Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem.

**Acts 15:2**

Later on, it appears that only James remained over the churches in the area around Jerusalem.

**Acts 21:18**

During the Age of the Apostles, the Lord Jesus Christ personally directed where His apostles could and could not go.

**Acts 16:6-8, compare 1 Peter 1:1**

**Age of the Local Church**

**Philippians 1:1**

The terms “**overseers and deacons**” refers to the organization of the local church in the *culmination* stage of the present dispensation.

**Philippians 1:1**

Both overseers and deacons are called “saints”. Both are “in Christ”. The organization and structure of local churches established these offices for administering the local church.

**1 Timothy 3:15**

These offices are to be distinguished from spiritual gifts; they have a selective and restrictive set of qualifications and disqualifications.

Overseers: **1 Timothy 3:1-7**

Deacons: **1 Timothy 3:8-13**

**Synonymous and Interchangeable Terminology**

The terms *overseer* and *elder* are interchangeable. They stress different aspects of the responsibilities of the pastor-teacher.

**Used interchangeably by Paul.**

**Acts 20:17, 28**

**Titus 1:5, 7**

In Titus 1:5,7, the *elders* (**οἱ πρεσβύτεροι**) are synonymous with *overseers* (**οἱ ἐπίσκοποι**)

In Acts 20:17 and 28, the *elders* (**οἱ πρεσβύτεροι**) are called *overseers* (**οἱ ἐπίσκοποι**). And in verses 28 and 29, they are commanded to *shepherd* (**ποιμαίνω**) the *flock* (**ποίμνιον**).

**Used interchangeably by Peter.**

In 1 Peter 5:1,2, the *elders* (**οἱ πρεσβύτεροι**) are commanded to *shepherd* (**ποιμαίνω**) and *oversee* (**ἐπισκοπέω**) their *flock* (**ποίμνιον**), in anticipation of being faithful to the Chief Shepherd (**ἀρχιποίμην**) of verse 4.

The selfless nature of this activity is developed by the Apostle who heard the message of the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-18) and who was commanded to shepherd His sheep (John 21:15-17).

Both *overseers* and *elders* are commanded to *shepherd* (**ποιμαίνω**) the *flock* (**ποίμνιον**) of God.

The overseer/elder may not have the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher (Ephesians 4:11), but every pastor-teacher becomes an overseer/elder when he is considered faithful and placed into service.

**1 Timothy 1:12; 3:1**

## Plurality of Elders

During the Age of the Apostles there is abundant evidence for a plurality of elders in a single local church.

**Acts 14:23; 15:4; 20:17**

**James 5:14**

Plural elders were appointed by the Apostles, or by representatives of the Apostles.

**Titus 1:5**

Elders were subject to Apostolic authority during this transitional period.

**1 Timothy 5:19,20**

During the Age of the Local Church, local churches will have either a single elder or a plurality of elders.

In **1 Timothy 3** the overseer is singular, the deacons are plural.

In **Revelation 2 and 3** the singular messenger is directly accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ and responsible to Him.

The overall necessity in the Church Age is for orderliness, and *every* pattern in the Old and New Testaments consists of a top-down mode of leadership and accountability to God.

**1 Corinthians 14:40**

Let all things be done decently and in order.

God's established protocol for temporal-life government called for a single King as the responsible party before Him, in the leadership of the people. God also established the single High Priest as the responsible party for spiritual leadership.

If there is a plurality of elders, then one of those elders should be thought of as the "ruling elder", and the "messenger" (angel) of that particular local church.

**1 Timothy 5:17**

**Revelation 1:20 ff**

## Equality of the Elder-Overseer-Pastor

As a believer in Jesus Christ in a local church, the Overseer-Elder-Pastor is a member of the local body and is not superior in rank to any other member of the body.

**Romans 12:3-8**

**1 Corinthians 12:12-25**

As the responsible party before God, he has an even stricter accountability because of his office.

**Ezekiel 34:2 ff**

**Luke 12:48**

**James 3:1**

**1 Peter 5:4**

**Revelation 2 and 3**

The Elder-Overseer-Pastor is not a tyrant, but an example of humility.

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**1 Peter 5:3** compare verse 5,6

## Attitudes and Activities in a Local Church

This section provides a collection of Bible references dealing with the basic attitude and activities which are present in a local church that is functioning as described in Ephesians 4:11-16.

### Attitudes in the Local Church

Love for one another:

**Romans 13:8**

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

**1 Thessalonians 3:11,12**

Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.

And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:

**1 Thessalonians 4:9,10**

But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;

**2 Thessalonians 1:3**

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other abounds;

**1 Peter 1:22**

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

Forbearance or relaxed tolerance toward others:

**Ephesians 4:2**

With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

**Colossians 3:13**

Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

Acceptance or willingness to receive others into assembly:

**Romans 15:7**

Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

An attitude which is neither judgmental or condemning:

**Romans 14:13**

Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

**1 Corinthians 4:5**

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

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**James 4:11,12**

Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judges his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judges the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

Willingness to subordinate one's own desires to the needs and interests of others:

**Philippians 2:3,4**

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

**1 Peter 5:5,6**

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resists the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

**Romans 12:10**

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

Genuine devotion toward one another as Family of God:

**Romans 12:10.**

Harmony or rapport that transcends social barriers:

**Romans 12:16-18**

Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

**Romans 14:19**

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

**James 2:1-4.**

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

And ye have respect to him that wears the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

Priority of unity within the congregations:

**Ephesians 4:3,13**

3 Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:

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**Colossians 3:14**

And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

Forgiveness

**Ephesians 4:32**

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Encouraging one another:

**Hebrews 3:12,13**

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

**Hebrews 10:24**

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

**1 Thessalonians 5:11**

Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

**Romans 15:4,5**

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:

**Activities in the Local Church**

Edifying one another:

**Ephesians 4:29**

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

**1 Thessalonians 5:11**

Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

**Romans 14:18-20**

For he that in these things serves Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eats with offence

**Romans 15:1,2**

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification.

Serving one another:

**Galatians 5:13**

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

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Being kind to one another

**Ephesians 4:32**

**1 Peter 3:8,9**

Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

Showing hospitality:

**1 Peter 4:9**

Use hospitality one to another without grudging.

**3 John 5-8**

Beloved, do faithfully whatsoever you do to the brethren, and to strangers;

Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well:

Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow helpers to the truth.

Partaking of the Communion:

**1 Corinthians 11:17-34**

**Acts 2:42-46**

Admonishing one another:

**Romans 15:14**

And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.

**1 Corinthians 4:14**

I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you.

**1 Thessalonians 5:14**

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

Restoring carnal believers:

**Galatians 6:1**

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

Praying for one another:

**James 5:16**

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

### **The Local Church's Function as a Community of Believers**

Our relationship with God is described in family terms:

**Galatians 3:26**

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

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**John 1:12,13**

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Christians are commanded to have a family-like devotion to one another:

**Romans 12:10**

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

The local church is called the household of God:

**1 Timothy 3:15**

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.

Paul recommends to Timothy how to relate to others in the congregation:

**1 Timothy 5:1,2**

Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren;

The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.

Leadership qualifications include how well a man fulfills his family responsibilities:

**1 Timothy 3:4,5,12**

One that rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

12 Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

## The Κοινωνία of the Church – Christian Fellowship

By **Chester McCalley**, late pastor of Beth Haven Church, Kansas City, MO

In Acts 2, the church is born. It had an initial membership of something more than 3000 men and women. The life of this group developed in four specific areas, described in ACTS 2:42. These areas were doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer.

These four areas of fellowship are described in two couplets, that is, doctrine and fellowship are linked together, and breaking of bread and prayer are linked together.

The Greek term for fellowship is κοινωνία (**koinonia**). The following is a brief word study on the meaning of **koinonia** as it relates to man. Fellowship with God, as described in 1 JOHN 1 is not included in this study.

### Definition

The word **koinonia** carries the basic idea of having something in common. The word is related to κοινή (**koine**), meaning common, which we use to refer to **koine** Greek, the original language of the New Testament, which was common to many people at a certain time in history. JUDE 3 speaks of our common (**koine**) salvation, referring to a salvation known and shared by all believers. The best way to bring the meaning of **koinonia** into English is to speak of joint participation in something.

### Areas of Joint Participation or Fellowship in the Early Church

#### Koinonia in Material Things

ROMANS 15:26, 27. The word contribution is **koinonia**.

2 COR. 8:4, fellowship

2 COR. 9:1, distribution

GAL. 6:6, communicate with

PHIL. 4:15, communicated

Note that in each passage there is joint participation in something material - money.

### **Koinonia in Suffering**

PHIL. 3:10, fellowship

1 PETER 4:13, partakers. Here is a godly believer participating in the suffering area.

### **Koinonia in Evil**

2 JOHN 11, partaker in evil

1 COR. 10:20, fellowship in evil

In these two passages joint participation may be had in evil by expressing cordiality toward doctrinal error or by association with idolatry. MATT. 23:30 speaks of **koinonia** in murder.

### **Koinonia in the Incarnation of Christ**

HEBREWS 2:14 shows that Christ became a joint participant with us when He took on a human body.

### **Koinonia at the Lord's Table**

I COR. 10:16 says that we have communion or **koinonia** with the blood and body of Christ.

### **Koinonia in Spreading the Gospel**

GAL. 2:6-9 tells how Peter, Paul and other apostles were given the right hands of fellowship indicating joint participation in the spread of the gospel.

### **Koinonia in Salvation**

2 PETER 1:4 says that by the word of God we become partakers of the divine nature.

### **Koinonia in the Holy Spirit**

2 Cor. 13:14 and Phil. 2:1 both indicate a joint participation of the believer and the Holy Spirit.

### **Koinonia in a Common Effort**

Luke 5:10 expresses this where James, John and Simon are called partners or **koinonia**. The joint participation was in the fishing business which they all shared.

### **Summary**

Fellowship in the New Testament means joint participation in some area, defined by context. In no passage is fellowship presented as a goal or end in itself. It is merely the by product of common goals or possessions. The more the believer discovers the salvation common to all other believers, the more fellowship occurs.

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