

Salvation and Local Church Membership

INTRODUCTION:

1. This is an important subject because there is much confusion in the religious world about it despite the Bible having a lot to say concerning this matter.
 - A. This confusion is the result of...
 - i. General ignorance of the Bible's teaches as well as outright rejection of its teaching.
 - ii. Extremism begetting extremism:
 - a. Catholicism once said that membership in a RCC was necessary to go to heaven because the RCC through its priests and sacrament is the *dispenser* of saving grace.
 - b. In reaction to this Protestant churches, or churches that "protested" Catholic rule and doctrine, established equally extreme doctrines that teach that one's membership in the local church *plays no part in salvation*.
 - B. What matters is not what Catholicism or Protestantism teaches, but what the Scriptures teach.
2. And, that is what I want us to consider today—what the scriptures teach about the relationship of our salvation in Christ to local church membership.
3. To address this subject, I want to consider:
 - A. **How preaching the Gospel makes disciples**
 - B. How the preaching of the Gospel resulted in the **formation of local churches**
 - C. How the local church was created by God for the spiritual well-being of its members.

BODY:

I. Preaching the Gospel produces disciples:

- A. The saving gospel is to be preached to the world producing *disciples* (Matt. 28:18-20 – “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ **teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.”).
 1. Being a disciple only **begins in baptism** (28:19).
 2. Being a disciple is **lived by learning** and **obeying** the Lord's **commands** (28:20).
- B. This process was followed by the apostles in carrying out the Great Commission (Acts 2).
 1. At Pentecost the process of making disciples began with preaching the gospel, which presented Jesus as their **Savior** and their **Lord**, requiring **obedience** to Christ (2:36).
 2. The hearers were then commanded to be **baptized** for forgiveness of their sins (2:38).
 3. Those willing to accept the gospel were baptized, added to the saved by the Lord, and then *diligently sought out opportunities to learn Christ's will to obey it* (2:41-42).
 - a. That is what a disciple, a Christian, does—they seek out opportunities to learn/grow because a disciple is a *follower* of Christ and a Christian is one who seeks to *be like Christ*, which requires much teaching and learning.
 - b. Those today who are serious about being disciples, or Christians, will seek out the opportunities afforded them to learn Christ's will, as did these early Christians.

II. When the gospel was preached and souls were saved, local churches were formed

- A. The scriptures present a pattern of the gospel being preached, resulting in souls saved, which resulted in local churches being formed.
 1. We this pattern in the preaching work of the persecuted Jews who were scattered from Jerusalem (Acts 11:19, 25-26 – “Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and **Antioch**, **preaching the word** to no one but the Jews only... ²⁵ Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. ²⁶ And when he had found him, he brought him to **Antioch**. So it was that **for a whole year they assembled with the church** and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”).
 2. We see this pattern in the preaching work of Paul and Barnabas:

- a. Acts 14:21-23 – “And when they had **preached the gospel** to that city and **made many disciples**, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” ²³ So when they had **appointed elders in every church**, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”
- b. Acts 15:36, 40-41 – “Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in **every city where we have preached the word** of the Lord, and **see how they are doing**.”... ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. ⁴¹ And he went through Syria and Cilicia, **strengthening the churches**.”
3. When people became disciples of Christ through obeying the gospel, they were taught to become **members** of a local church, **and they did become members**.
- B. This pattern is strengthened by the fact that Christians are **commanded** to be a part of this local church assembly (Heb. 10:19-27 – “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹ and having a High Priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider one another in order to **stir up love and good works**, ²⁵ **not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together**, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. ²⁶ For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.”).
1. The Hebrew writer is seeking to assure that his Jewish Christians readers hold fast to the infinitely better way of Christ over the O.T. way (10:19-22).
 - a. Through Christ’s blood disciples can enter the Holiest place, or truly approach God, not as in the O.T. where just the one High Priest could do so once a year (10:19-20).
 - b. Through Christ’s High Priesthood they can enter with *full confidence* because their evil conscience has been cleansed in Christ (10:21-22).
2. Based on this, the Christians are commanded to do two things (10:23-25).
 - a. They were to hold to their confession of hope in Christ without wavering (10:23).
 - b. They were to consider and encourage their brethren by being at the assemblies of the local church, unlike some who were not doing so (10:24-25).
 - c. So, holding on to Christ, or remaining in Christ, is directly related to fulfilling one’s duties as a member of a local church.
3. The seriousness of leaving one’s hope and, thus, forsaking the assemblies is *willful sin* that will negate Christ’s sacrifice in one’s life (10:26-27).
4. One’s willingness/unwillingness to commit to the purpose/work of the local church is directly connected to the faithfulness of that individual and has eternal consequences!

III. The local church was created by God for the spiritual welfare of its members.

- A. God provides spiritual oversight needed for the wellbeing of a Christian through the **eldership** of a local church.
 1. Elders are to be appointed in every church, as did Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:23 – “So when they had **appointed elders in every church**, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”).
 2. Elders are to oversee and shepherd the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-4 – “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ² **Shepherd** the flock of God which is among you, serving as **overseers**, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³ nor as

- being lords over those entrusted to you, but being **examples to the flock**; ⁴ and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”).
3. Due to the eternally serious nature of their office...
 - a. Elders must meet certain qualifications revealed by God (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).
 - b. This may also explain why there is to be a plurality of elders (more than one) in a local church (no dictator), requiring at least two men to meet the qualifications.
 4. Members of a local church are commanded to submit to their elders because these men **watch out for their souls** (Heb. 13:17 – “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”).
 5. Only within the confines of local church membership can this security of eldership oversight be had and one’s duty to submit to them for the good of one’s soul be fulfilled.
- B. God also provides for the spiritual wellbeing of disciples in the local church through edification.
1. The work of **evangelists** and **teachers** in the local church are for building up Christians (Eph. 4:11-12, 14 – “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some **evangelists** [preaching], and some **pastors** [shepherding] and **teachers** [instruct/classes], ¹² for the **equipping of the saints** for the work of ministry, for the **edifying of the body of Christ**,...¹⁴ 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”).
 2. The careful eye of brethren who are there to correct and help us along our spiritual way.
 - a. 1 Thess. 5:14-15 – “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. ¹⁵ See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.”
 - b. Gal. 6:1-2 – “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. ² Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”
 3. The **oversight** from the elders, the **preaching**, the **teaching** taking place **in our classes**, and the **interaction** and **association** with brethren **here in this local church** are all means God has provided for the growth and protection of Christians.
 - a. It is only those who commit to being **members** of a local church that can take full advantage of these wonderful blessings and assurances provided by the Lord.
 - b. Only those who commit to being **members** of a local church can do their duty to encourage and watch out for the spiritual wellbeing of their brethren as God desires.

CONCLUSION:

1. We have seen that God plan for our salvation includes the local church and our membership in it.
 - A. When the gospel was preached and people obeyed, and those who were saved formed local churches and were expected to be faithful members of these local churches.
 - B. The saved are to be members of a local church because it is within the local church that God provides the oversight and protection needed to help assure our faithfulness in this hostile world.
2. If you are a Christian, this should give you cause:
 - A. To determine to take the necessary steps to be committed member of this, or another faithful local church, to fulfill your spiritual duties within it that God has revealed in His word.
 - B. If you are already a member of this local church, to examine your commitment to the work of this church and whether you are taking these duties as seriously as you should.
3. Of course, if you are not a Christian and are living outside of Christ, it **MUST** begin for you with obeying the Gospel in F-R-C-B, upon which you will then be raised to newness of life and able to fulfill you duties to Christ in your personal life and in your expected membership in the local church.