

Bible Blueprint

Lesson Four

Examining the



Local Church

by John M. Duvall

Thank you for your interest in learning more about the Bible. Your desire is highly commendable. As per your request, we are sending you this fourth lesson of our Bible Blueprint home Bible study. As you will notice, the question page (pages 9 and 10) is designed so that you can cut and mail back the questions for grading. Once we receive the question page, we will grade the questions and mail them back to you along with lesson five. If you have any questions which might arise from this study, we will be happy to try to offer Bible answers to your questions.

Please mail the question page along with any further questions that might arise during the study to:

Gore Boulevard church of Christ

“Bible Blueprint Bible Study”

6235 W. Gore Blvd.

Lawton, OK 73505

Again, thank you for your interest.

All scripture references, unless otherwise noted,
are quoted from the New King James Version.

The Local Church or Congregation

As a careful study of the Bible will reveal, the church, the body of Christ, as a whole possesses no collective organization. That is to say, other than Jesus being the head of the church, the church possesses no organization. The church possess no board of directors, no president, no head leader, no head prophet, shepherd, etc. All collective work (church work) is done on the part of the local church (congregation.) The “local church” is made up of those “called out” (Christians) who live in a local area.

The first local church was made up of three thousand people who obeyed the Gospel’s call to salvation as found in Acts 2:41-47. In this passage we see the signs of a local church. In Acts 2:42-43, we see a collective worship. In Acts 2:45, we see a collective treasury. In Acts 2:44, we see that they had all things in common.

As time went on, the Christians in Jerusalem went back to their home cities and taught the Gospel. After the stoning of Stephen (Acts 6-8), the Christians were scattered everywhere. However, these Christians continued to teach the Gospel. *“Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.”* (Acts 8:4) As these newly born Christians were teaching people in their respective cities, people were obeying the word of God. When people from a certain locale were saved, a local church was formed. The New Testament is filled with example upon examples of local churches of Christ. (See chart to the left.)

Local Churches in the First Century

- The church in Jerusalem. (Acts 8:1)
- The church in Corinth. (1 Cor. 1:2)
- The church in Antioch. (Acts 11:26)
- The church in Caesarea. (Acts 18:22)
- The church in Ephesus. (Acts 20:17; Rev. 2:1)
- The church in Cenchrea. (Rom. 16:1)
- The church in Philippi. (Phil. 4:15)
- The church in Laodicea. (Col. 4:16)
- The church in Thessalonica. (1 Thess. 1:1)
- The church in Smyrna. (Rev. 2:8)
- The church in Pergamos. (Rev. 2:12)
- The church in Thyatira. (Rev. 2:18)
- The church in Sardis. (Rev. 3:1)
- The church in Philadelphia. (Rev. 3:7)

The Organization of the Local Church

The local church of Christ possesses organization, beginning with elders (pastors, Ephesians 4:11 / bishops, 1 Timothy 3:1) who oversee the local church. From Bible examples, we learn that each local church is to have a plurality of qualified elders. One such example is found in Acts 14:23, which reads, *“So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”* (cf. Acts 20:17) (The Bible does not contain any verses which support the idea of one man ruling or leading the local church.) Qualified elders are elders who meet the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

The elders are to have oversight over the local church. Peter taught elders, *“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;”* (1 Peter 5:2-3; cf. 1 Timothy 5:17) In their duties to oversee, the elders are to shepherd or feed the local church. Paul admonished the elders of the Ephesus church of Christ, *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”* (Acts 20:28)

In addition to having oversight over the local church, the elders are to also protect the church from false teachers. In his warning to the elders from Ephesus, Paul goes on to say, *“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”* (Acts 20:28-31)

The local church’s responsibility toward the elders is simple: The local church is to be in subjection to the elders. Here is what we find: *“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.” (Hebrews 13:17)

In the organization of the local church, we find that a local church is to have deacons. Deacons serve as helpers, servants, or ministers to the church, apparently tending to the physical needs of the local church. (The meaning of the Greek word translated as deacon means helper, servant, or minister.) One such example is found in Philippians 1:1, *“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops (elders, jmd) and deacons:”* (Philippians 1:1) Just as the local elders are to meet certain qualifications, so too are the deacons. These qualifications can be found in I Timothy 3:8-13.

Within the organization of the local church, there are members. When a person is added to the body of Christ, he is to join himself to a local congregation (church) so that he can work with them. Let us consider the example of the apostle Paul. *“And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.”* (Acts 9:26-28) When Paul went to Jerusalem, he tried to join the brethren in their local work. However, due to his past history of persecuting Christians, the members of the church in Jerusalem were afraid of Paul. Once Barnabas spoke on Paul’s behalf, the brethren were willing to accept Paul. At this point, Paul became a member of the church of Christ in Jerusalem.

Another example of an active member of a local congregation was a person named Phoebe. Phoebe was an active member of the church of Christ at Cenchrea. (Romans 16:1,2)

A sign of one who has joined or fastened himself to the local church is his acting as a member of the local congregation. The apostle Paul wrote, “. . .

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. . . ” (Romans 12:3-8) A member of the local church does his part in the work of the local church.

The Local Church Provides Assemblies for the Saints

The local church bears certain responsibilities as seen within the Bible. The local church is to provide for assemblies on the first day of the week. These first day of the week assemblies provide an opportunity for the church to be reminded of Christ’s death and to proclaim His death until He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:20, 23-26; Acts 20:7) In 1 Corinthians 11, we see Paul reminding the local church in Corinth of their responsibility to partake of the Lord’s supper in a proper manner. In Acts 20:7, we have an example showing that the church was to partake of the Lord’s supper on the first day of the week.

The local church provides assemblies so that Christians can collectively sing praises to God. Consider the following two verses: *“speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,”* (Ephesians 5:19) and *“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.”* (Colossians 3:16) Through songs, Christians can praise God and receive admonition or encouragement and strength.

Worship Services

- Proclaiming of the Lord’s death through observing the Lord’s Supper (first day of the week observance)
- Songs of praises and admonition are sung
- Bible Lessons (sermons) are presented.
- Prayers of thanksgiving, intercession, and supplications are offered to God
- Members give to the work of the church (first day of the week)

The local church also provides assemblies so that those present can be taught the word of God. The sermons should teach, admonish, edify, and rebuke those present. The sermons are to remind the Christian how to live and to teach the lost how to be saved. Paul told Timothy, *“Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”* (1 Timothy 4:13) Paul also wrote, *“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”* (2 Timothy 2:2) Acts 20:7 and 2:42 are two examples of saints assembling together to hear a message from God's word.

The local church provides assemblies so that Christians can give to the collective treasury of the local church for the work of the local church. As we study the scriptures, we find that the local church had three specific works or responsibilities. (We will examine these later in this lesson.) These works sometimes required money. The local church, when assembled together on the first day of the week, is to take up a collection from among the saints. One such example is seen in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. Paul wrote, *“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.”* (1 Corinthians 16:1,2)

When the local church assembles together, they do so for spiritual reasons. The local church assembles to study God's word. The local church assembles to sing songs of praises and songs of admonition. The church assembles to remember the Lord's death through the partaking of the Lord's supper. The local church assembles to offer prayers unto God (1 Timothy 2:1-3, 8). In short, the local church assembles to worship God, to provoke one another unto love and good works (Hebrews 10:24,25), and to encourage and edify each other (1 Corinthians 14:26).

Work of the Local Church

- Evangelism
- Edification
- Benevolence

Other Responsibilities of the Local Church

A study of the local church would not be complete without an examination of the other responsibilities of the local church. The local church bears a responsibility towards evangelism. (cf. 1 Timothy 3:15) Evangelism is one of the reasons why Christians assemble together, as shown earlier in our study. The local church can support a local preacher. (1 Corinthians 9:3-14) The local church can send people out to teach the gospel. (Acts 13:1-3) The local church can support the gospel being taught in other areas. (2 Corinthians 11:8-9)

The local church bears the responsibility of edification. The local church is to edify its own members. This edification is accomplished through the assemblies provided for the saints. The writer of Hebrews wrote, *“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 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.”* (Hebrews 10:24-25) In Colossians 3:15-16, Paul wrote, *“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 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.”*

The local church also bears the responsibility of giving aid to needy Christians. One such example is found in Acts 11. *“Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”* (Acts 11:29-30) Consider Paul’s commendation of the church in Corinth: *“... seeing that through the proving of you by this ministration they glorify God for the obedience of your confession unto the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution unto them and unto all;”* (2 Corinthians 9:12-13, ASV)

 Your Name

Questions

(Circle the correct answer.)

1. What did Paul appoint in every church? (Acts 14:23)
 - a. elders
 - b. preachers
 - c. teachers
2. Who is to oversee the local church? (1 Peter 5:1-3)
 - a. preachers
 - b. deacons
 - c. elders
 - d. church treasurer
3. What is the meaning of the Greek word translated as deacon?
 - a. helper, servant, or minister
 - b. ruler, leader, overseer
 - c. entertainment coordinator
 - d. youth group leader
4. Who tried to join himself with the church in Jerusalem? (Acts 9:26-28)
 - a. Saul
 - b. David
 - c. Demas
 - d. John
5. Phoebe was an active member of which church? (Romans 16:1,2)
 - a. Corinth
 - b. Ephesus
 - c. Cenchrea
 - d. Antioch
6. The Lord's Supper is intended to proclaim what? (1 Corinthians 11:20, 23-26)
 - a. Jesus' birth
 - b. Jesus' death
 - c. Jesus' ascension to Heaven
 - d. Jesus' miracles
7. In Acts 20:7, we see that Paul did what?
 - a. put on a comedy show
 - b. spoke the message till midnight
 - c. gave a short talk
8. How are Christians to make melody in their hearts? (Ephesians 5:19)
 - a. talking
 - b. playing a piano
 - c. playing a trumpet
 - d. singing

9. Upon what day of the week were the Corinthian Christians told to take up a collection? (1 Corinthians 16:1,2)
- first day
 - second day
 - third day
 - seventh day
10. During the worship services, all things are to be done for _____. (1 Corinthians 14:26)
- for the praise of men
 - edification
 - the preacher
11. Which of the following is not a work of the local church?
- evangelism
 - benevolence
 - social entertainer
 - edification
12. “not _____ the _____ of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another,” (Hebrews 10:25)
- attending / assembling
 - forsaking / assembling
 - forsaking / social gatherings
 - forsaking / basketball games
13. To whom did the Christians in Antioch send benevolence or relief? (Acts 11:29-30)
- brethren in Judea
 - all the poor of Jerusalem
 - brethren in Rome
 - all the poor of Judea
14. Paul told Timothy to give attention to . . . (1 Timothy 4:13)
- reading
 - exhortation
 - doctrine
 - all the above

