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 Title: “Why does the Church Gather?”
 Text: 1 Corinthians 14:26-33
 Theme: The local church exists to build up, encourage, and comfort its members for the purpose of kingdom living.

Why do Christians assemble and what is the purpose of the church gathered? Is this assembling necessary? Could I worship in isolation, cut off from the believing community, and still be biblical? Is the purpose of the church gathered for edification? Is a community of believers a necessary part of the Christian life? Why do we do what we do on Sunday mornings? What is the difference between a church service geared toward the unbelieving and a church service geared toward God? Why should the local church have a place of priority in the Christian life? What are the implications of this priority? Why are home bible studies not local churches?

These are important questions. How we answer these will determine how we view the local church and what our relationship is to it.

Does this idea have an eternal value?

Is being committed to a local church important? Is coming as an individual, couple, and/or family essential? Does our presence here have an eternal benefit? If you and I do not see the eternal consequence of this present gathering, then we will be very reluctant to commit ourselves to this or any other fellowship.

ILLUSTRATION:

Membership in a confessing body is fundamental to the faithful Christian life. Failure to do so defies the explicit warning not to forsake “our assembling together.” His understanding of this prompted Martin Luther to say, “Apart from the church, salvation is impossible.” Not that the church provides salvation; God does. But because the “saved” one can’t fulfill what it means to be a Christian apart from the church, membership becomes the indispensable mark of salvation.

“So highly does the Lord esteem the communion of His church,” Calvin wrote, “that He considers everyone a traitor and apostate from religion who perversely withdraws himself from any Christian society which preserves the true ministry of the word and sacraments.”

The Body, Charles W. Colson, 1992, Word Publishing, Page 70

Everything inside of 1 Corinthians is about local church ministry. It is not about the individual Christian in contrast to the church. It is about individual

members of one body, a local church. Christians come together and are a part of local churches.

“Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, **that ye come together** not for the better, but for the worse. 18 For first of all, **when ye come together in the church**, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it” (1 Cor. 11:17).

“**When ye come together therefore into one place**, this is not to eat the Lord's supper” (1 Cor. 11:20).

³³ “Wherefore, my brethren, **when ye come together** to eat, tarry one for another. ³⁴ And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; **that ye come not together** unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come” (1 Cor. 11:33, 34).

“**If therefore the whole church be come together into one place**, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?” (1 Cor. 14:23).

“How is it then, brethren? **when ye come together**, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor. 14:26).

As believers we should regularly assemble and identify ourselves with a local church. This becomes highly pointed when we consider chapters 12-14. Let us review what we have already noted in our earlier studies by asking the question, “What is the larger context of 1 Corinthians 12-14?”

First Corinthians 12-14 deals with the Holy Spirit's gifting in and through the local church. It is addressing problems within the local church and the expression of this gifting.

- Chapter 12 deals with body unity within member diversity.
- Chapter 13 deals with love as the one element that is strong enough to provide body unity within member diversity.
- Chapter 14 deals specifically with the gifts of biblical prophecy and biblical tongues in their expression within a local church family.

Paul is addressing a problem that existed inside of a local church. He is not addressing the church universal. Before we get into the text, let us define what the church and is not.

I. What is a local church?

A. What it is NOT

1. It is not defined by physical structure

A building is what houses a church when it chooses to gather locally. The building however is not the church. It is simply a building. Although we must be stewards of this physical building, this building must not become our primary focus.

2. It is not defined by culture

What a church body might look like has various expressions based on its cultural context. What a church looks like here in Midwest America can and will look differently than a church in the south or on the west coast.

This is why our church planter Jason Knapp made the statement in his last email,

“Pray that we can be a good example to them of these things (i.e. prayer and worship). And that our times together would not look ‘westernized’ but ‘Tobonized’ or, in other words: indigenous.” (Saturday, March 03, 2007 5:56PM)

Cultural relevancy must not be at the expense of theological precision. Our present evangelical world is enamored by a spirituality without theology. This is a boat without an anchor (or engine) that is drifting toward the dark falls of destruction.

3. It is not defined by generation

The church is trans-generational. It is made up of all demographics and age groups. A church should reach the community in which it is found.

4. It is not defined by location

The church universal is just that, universal. The church is everywhere His people are gathered for the purpose of worship.

B. What it is

1. It is defined by who Christ is (Matt. 16:16)

“What think ye of Christ?” (Matt. 16:16) is still the singular most important question that can be asked of anyone and its answer will determine whether or not a local church can exist. It is Christ-centered.

2. It is defined by what He has done (Acts 20:28)

The redemptive activity of Christ at the cross is tantamount to the existence of the local church. Acts 20:28 define the church as a blood purchased body. It is cross-celebrating.

I do not accept as viable the idea that you can love Jesus without loving His church. There is no real difference between the body of Christ and Jesus Christ. This is why John says, “If you do not love one another, you do not have the love of God in you” (1 John 4).

3. It is defined by what He is doing (Matt. 28:18-20)

All local church work is defined by the outworking of His eternal purpose to make His name known and to see the glory of the LORD cover the entire landscape. It is global in its expression. It is church-planting/kingdom-manifesting.

4. It is defined by who His people are in Him (1 Cor. 14:3)

The local church is a Christ-exalting, Word-centered, Global-impacting, Grace-celebrating fellowship. The local church must be a place where the cross brings freedom and not bondage. Christ must be setting His people free or it is failing to carry out His mission. It is grace-liberating.

This brings us to our second point.

II. How does Paul see the local church in 1 Corinthians 12-14?

The apostle makes seven statements concerning the church in chapters 12-14.

- A. The church gathered is for the common good of those gathered (12:7; 14:4, 5, 12, 26).

“He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth **edifieth the church**” (1 Cor. 14:4).

“I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that **the church may receive edifying**” (1 Cor. 14:5).

“Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel **to the edifying of the church**” (1 Cor. 14:12).

When the church gathers it is to everyone’s benefit. There is profit in our coming together. I can say this because this is what the text says. Throughout 1 Corinthians 14 the word “edification” is used. It means to build up, to construct. It is used in 8:1 for love building up and in 10:23 for noting how not all things build up. Notice its occurrence in 1 Corinthians 3:10 and then notice the statement in 3:16 and 17 as well as 1 Corinthians 11:17.

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is **building** on it. But each man must be careful how he **builds** on it” (1 Cor. 3:10).

¹⁶ “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? ¹⁷ If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are” (1 Cor. 3:16, 17).

“But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse” (1 Cor. 11:17).

Friend, it is a grievous sin when people attack the body of Christ. There is an intrinsic demerit to be played out against those who would tear down the body of Christ. It is not about the singular believer, but the body of Christ, this local church and other churches like this one.

How is the body promoted? First Corinthians 14:3 gives us three ways.

1. The body is promoted through edification (14:3)
2. The body is promoted through encouragement (14:3)
3. The body is promoted through comfort (14:3)

We are gathered to see Christ in and through His people. Who have you seen Christ to this past week? Who have you built up? Who have you encouraged? Who have you comforted? The gathering is for this singular purpose.

A Christ-exalting message is a grace-based message through a word-centered message that is to have a global-impacting consequence. He is the message that brings edification, encouragement, and comfort to the shattered, the sad, and the scared.

If Christianity is for you a dark thing, then I would love to introduce you to Jesus Christ who is the light of the world. If, as a Christian you are defeated,

then I would love to show you Christ your victory. If, as a Christian you are in bondage, then I would love to show you Christ your liberator. This is why we gather. This is who He is and who we are in Him.

B. The church gathered is a work of the Holy Spirit (12:6, 11).

“And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*” (1 Cor. 12:6).

Both verses use the word “energy.” The church gathered is a work of the Holy Spirit. His energy is in this place. He is the one animating this body. This gathering is not about you, but about Him. When we realize this, each of us will be edified, encouraged, and comforted.

C. The church gathered is singular (12:8, 12-14, 18-20 [one body]).

As a fellowship, we do not have many ministries. We have only one ministry that expresses itself through various venues.

The county of Waukesha has only one church. It is the church of Jesus Christ.

“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” (1 Cor. 1:2).

“For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, **as I teach every where in every church**” (1 Cor. 4:17).

“But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. **And so ordain I in all churches**” (1 Cor. 7:17).

“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to **the church of God**” (1 Cor. 10:32).

“But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, **neither the churches of God**” (1 Cor. 11:16).

³³ “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as **in all churches of the saints**. ³⁴ Let your women keep silence **in the churches**: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law” (1 Cor. 14:33, 34).

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to **the churches of Galatia**, even so do ye” (1 Cor. 16:1).

“The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, **with the church that is in their house**” (1 Cor. 16:19).

Paul speaks of local churches, plural, as being the church of Jesus Christ. Waukesha Bible Church does not have a corner on the truth nor is she the only good church in Waukesha or Wisconsin. She is unique as one of God's children with her own personality and gifting, but she is not the only child of God as expressed in local church ministry.

The one church of God expresses herself through various venues. Some of these venues are called Fox River, River Glenn, First Assembly of God, Spring Creek, KMCC, KMEFC, Faith Bible Church in Palmyra, First Bible Church in East Troy, Racine Bible Church in Racine, Elmbrook and the various "brooklings." But there is only one church. As a fellowship we support and celebrate the diversity that exists in the larger body of Christ.

D. The church gathered is diverse (12:12, 14, 20 [many members]).

Even among the larger church universal there is tremendous diversity. What sets us apart as being distinct from other churches? It is our core values and our mission statement that reflect a Reigning Grace. We believe that "Grace Reigns Because the Cross Still Stands."

This is where the grace message has its greatest impact. When we stop trying to fit everyone into our mold and embrace them with the arms of Christ, then we become a grace-celebrating family and one that lives under and in and out the reign of His grace.

E. The church gathered is inter-dependent (12:21, 25, 26).

²¹ And the eye **cannot say** to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

²⁵ so that there may be **no division in the body**, but that the members may have **the same care for one another**.

²⁶ And **if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it**; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

No one within the body of Christ has power to say to another member of the family, "I have no need of you." Everyone here needs someone else. There is no such thing as an independent Christian. Each part is necessary for the healthy functioning of the whole. Your gifting is necessary for someone else's spiritual health and someone else's spiritual gifting is necessary for your spiritual health. We are to care for one another. We must learn "to joy in another person's joy and to sorrow in another person's sorrow." This is when we become a biblical community of believers. This is what a church family looks like and is.

- F. The church gathered is organizationally functional (12:27-29; 14:34-36).

The church gathered is orderly (14:27, 33, 40). Chaos has no place in the local church. Order does not mean stifling or sterile. Order is the opposite of disorder. Organizational function enables the local church to be orderly. Our order of service is an intentional attempt to guide us in an undistracted manner in order that Jesus Christ and what He has done might be celebrated.

- G. The church gathered is God-centered (1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 14:25).

The church gathered is the church *of God*.

“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” (1 Cor. 1:2).

“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to **the church of God**” (1 Cor. 10:32).

“What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye **the church of God**, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not” (1 Cor. 11:22).

“For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted **the church of God**” (1 Cor. 15:9).

This is not the church of the created, but that of the Creator. God owns this place. He calls it by name; it is His.

When a church functions properly, then those present will say, “Surely God is in this place in truth.” As a Christ-exalting, Word-centered, Global-impacting, Grace-based family we come to worship.

- A God-centered worship moves sinners to repentance
- A God-centered worship moves members to joyful celebration and personal shepherding.
- A God-centered worship is not about me and my needs, but about Him and His glory.

When we gather it is for Him. When we gather and get this right, then all of our “felt needs” are met. If we do not make our gatherings God-centered, then we will fight an uphill battle.

This brings us to our third point.

III. Why must I be a part of a local church?

Our third point is strongly personal.

A. Individualism is contrary to the work of Christ

I am always amazed if someone says a church is not friendly. I am always amazed when someone leaves a fellowship and no one is told and no one knows. If you leave a fellowship, please have the common grace to let them know you are leaving and perhaps why.

B. Christians are designed for community

If you move to another area in our state or country, you should first find a Christ-exalting, Word-centered, Global-impacting, Grace-based fellowship to attend. Unless you believe all churches are the same, you should never accept another position for work that does not have near it a solid church family.

Churches are unique. It is not a “one size fits all” proposition. Find one that fits you and stick with it.

C. The Holy Spirit works in and through the leadership of local churches

I am not saying this because I am in a position of leadership. I am saying this because God has established positions within His church for leadership. The elders of a fellowship are identified by the work of overseeing.

“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” (Acts 20:28).

“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, **with the bishops and deacons**” (Phil. 1:1).

“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” (1 Pet. 5:2).

D. Your gifting is for the building up of His body in the context of local church ministry.

Your work is your work and God supplies you with work in order to meet your immediate needs and for the sustaining of His people. But your involvement in a local church is equally biblical. Your gifting is primarily for the local church and secondarily to the church universal.

APPLICATION (What's the NEXT STEP?)

1. Are you a member of a local church?
2. Is your identification to a local church casual or intentional? Do not be a church hopper. It is unfortunate when you must leave a fellowship, but start attending another one right away and serve His people there.
3. How are you building up the fellowship that surrounds you? What intentional part are you playing in the building up of this body?