

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

They are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye mistakes can be found. So he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at pastorpat@waukeshabile.org.

Date: November 14, 2004

Title: Not Forsaking Our Own Assembling Together

Text: Hebrews 10:19-25

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Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in the Storyline of the Bible. She is determined by design to have a God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching focused on personal discipleship through intentional and systematic instruction; a Global-impacting mission that resolves to be a church planting church; and a Grace-based fellowship where disciples are invited to live under a reigning grace characterized by a Gospel-driven sanctification that celebrates a divine monergism to the Christian life.

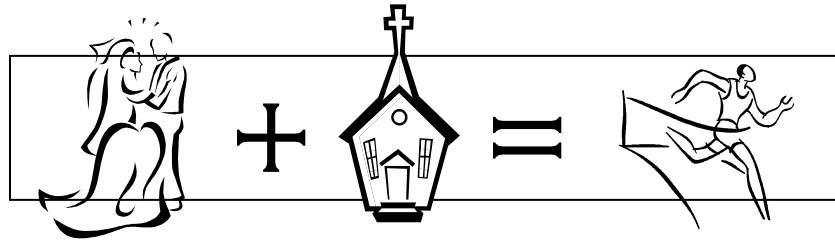
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NOT FORSAKING OUR OWN ASSEMBLING TOGETHER

(HEBREWS 10:19-25)

. . . not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

(Hebrews 10:25)



We live in a culture that has an abundance of venues for camaraderie and commitment. We can talk about Starbucks coffee, the Green Bay Packers, the Wisconsin Badgers, deer hunting, work, and a host of other settings that provide for us identity, unity, and loyalty. Such activities provide us with a sense of pleasure, satisfaction, and contentment. These places have, for many, replaced one's regular attendance at a Local Church. All of these "activities" can be of value to the individual, but they can never replace the need for the Local Church.

We live in **a culture of convenience**. In our world, the "quick fix" has become the preferred method of dealing with things. We spray away odors, bugs, weeds, and anything else that bothers us. Waste generation in 1960 was 8.1 million tons of waste per year. In 2000 it was 221.7 million tons. It is this kind of mindset that has created a separation in our levels of commitment to family, friends, church, ministry, and marriage. Yet unlike any of the above mentioned venues, the Local Church exists to strengthen and establish the marriage relationship.

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We live in a culture that easily disposes of what it does not want. Sentimentality and attachment are things of the past. This same mindset has crept into the Local Church and affects the way we view it. The Local

Church is to provide for us a sense of identity, unity and loyalty. It is to provoke within us these responses. This is what she is to be for us and to us:

- She is to provide for us a sense of **identity**. (This is my church)
- She is to provide for us a sense of **unity**. (I am a part of this fellowship)
- She is to provide for us a sense of **loyalty**. (These are my people)

But are these things important? I find the asking of the question intriguing. By the mere fact that it must be asked and then answered strongly suggests that there has been a huge shift in our thinking.

In her article, "Who Goes to Church? - Older Southern Women Do; Many Catholic Men Don't," Dalia Sussman provides us with this revealing information concerning regular church attendance:

Not counting weddings and funerals, 38 percent of Americans say they go to religious services at least once a week. But there are big differences across demographic groups, with self-reported attendance peaking among older people, women, Southerners and Baptists, among others.

The biggest gap is between the oldest and youngest age groups. Sixty percent of people age 65 and older report attending religious services at least once a week; among 18 to 30-year-olds, just 28 percent go that often. Previous ABCNEWS polls, similarly, have found that religious belief and practice increase with age.

There are other factors. Nearly half of Southerners attend services weekly, substantially more than elsewhere. Forty-four percent of women go weekly, compared to 32 percent of men. It follows that, among Southern women age 45 and up, weekly church attendance soars to 68 percent.

Forty-seven percent of Republicans attend church regularly, compared to 38 percent of Democrats and 29 percent of independents. And there's a big difference between Catholic women (49 percent go to church weekly) and Catholic men (26 percent attend every week.)

For most Americans, going to religious services means going to church, since 83 percent of adults in this country are

Christians. Forty-six percent of Protestants attend church at least weekly, peaking at 52 percent of Baptists. Just over two-thirds of Baptists are in the South, far more than elsewhere (the Midwest is next, at just 17 percent). That's one reason church attendance in the South is higher than elsewhere.

Gender Gap

Fewer Catholics, 38 percent, report attending church on at least a weekly basis. Men are the reason: As noted, 26 percent of Catholic men say they attend church that regularly, compared to 42 percent of Protestant men. There's no such difference between Protestant and Catholic women — about half in each group say they go to church at least once a week.¹

It is a mindset that has led to **a culture of non-commitment**. This has led to a tragic decline toward the marriage covenant. Friend, hardship will confront all of us. The church is not an iron clad guarantee, but the odds are greatly increased for us when as a couple we attend a local assembly.

Why is this so? One of the divinely ordained reasons behind God giving us the Local Church is for the training and sustaining of the marriage relationship. Initially let us consider three questions relating to the Local Church.



WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The Church is made up of two parts.

- **First**, there is the Church Global which is made up of all believers who have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).
- **Second**, there is the Church Local which is made up those who gather regularly with appointed leaders for the systematic study of God's Word with the intent of taking Christian truths globally.

Some will deny the existence of a universal church. Such a denial is unfortunate. Others treat the local assembly with little or no importance. This is not only unfortunate, but also tragic and detrimental to their spiritual and emotional well-being. The universal church allows us to see the magnitude of His work. It gives us great gratitude to know that He is building up His body. The universal church moves without

failure to her predetermined goal. The Local Church gives the universal church appearance. It is the “flesh and blood,” “sinew and bone,” of the universal church. It is how the body of Christ shows herself in various global communities.

The Local Church assists in the facilitating of our Lord’s universal exaltation. It is a means of manifesting grace in a tangible, concrete way. The importance of identifying oneself with a Local Church cannot be overestimated. There are two truths about the church we ought to note.

A. The Church was begun by Christ.

We believe that the Church was begun by Christ on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This is so because of two important facts.

1. The finished work of Christ (Acts 20:28).

Be on guard for yourselves and for 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).

2. The coming of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27).

But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you (John 16:7).

The coming of the Holy Spirit marks a shift in the way God deals with His people. Essentially the Holy Spirit's ministry remained the same between the Old and New Covenants. However, the fundamental difference is Spirit Baptism. Spirit Baptism is the non-experiential act whereby the Holy Spirit places (baptizes) believers into the body of Christ, whereby there exists a real union between the two parties. It is for this reason that Jesus can say to Paul in Acts 9:4, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Even though Saul was persecuting Christians, Christ could say, “me?” Why? Because of the organic union between the two parties through Spirit Baptism.

We cannot afford to underestimate the importance of any Evangelical Local Church. As that church represents the people of God, we must see them as those for whom Christ died.

B. The Church's foundation is Christ (1 Cor. 3:10, 11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6).

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. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:10, 11).

Christ is referred to in Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Peter 2:6 as the chief cornerstone. “The cornerstone (or foundation stone) concept is derived from the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation, important since all other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire structure (emphasis added).”² As the foundation stone (1 Cor. 3:11), Christ is the essential ingredient in the building and maintaining of any and all Local Churches. He is the one piece in whose absence everything would collapse.



Why is the Local Church necessary?

The Local Church is to be a Christ-Exalting, Word-Centered, Global-Impacting, Grace-Based Fellowship. She exists to shout the supremacy of God in all things (Rom. 11:36) by finding, celebrating and declaring He is enough in this life and the life that is to come (Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 4, 5) through the systematic study of His Word (2 Tim. 2:15) and to share this message with every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Matt. 28:18-20; Rev. 5:9). The achievement of this grand theme is possible through the ministry of Local Churches. This lofty goal is accomplished through divinely ordained means. There are five that I would like us to consider.

A. The Local Church is necessary for the organization of believers (1 Cor. 14:33).

After addressing various gifts and members within the body in chapters 12 through 14, Paul makes the following comment.

For God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints (1 Cor. 14:33).

God is not the God of disorder, and it makes sense that confusion

is out of His declared will. The Local Church enables us to push past our sense of fierce individualism and helps us embrace a sense of community. Individualism and community are conflicting views of the nature of humans, society and the relationship between them.

- Individualism holds that the individual is the primary unit of reality and the ultimate standard of value.
 - Community holds that the group is the primary unit of reality and the group's values are over those of the individual.
- Individualism holds that every person is an end in themselves and that no person should have to go without for the sake of another.
 - Community holds that the needs and goals of the individual are subordinate to those of the larger group and should be subordinated when the collective good so requires.

Church Historian and theologian Robert E. Webber, makes the following comment as to the harm individualism does to the community of faith.

We call Evangelicals to turn away from an individualism that makes the Church a mere addendum to God's redemptive plan. Individualistic Evangelicalism has contributed to the current problems of churchless Christianity, redefinitions of the Church according to business models, separatist ecclesiologies and judgmental attitudes toward the Church.³

Our individualism as a people creates autonomous ministries. A local church has only one ministry. It has various expressions as the targeted audience changes, but there is only one ministry. We must move away from a "me" mindset and develop a "we" mindset. It is as we become committed to the common vision that our strength will be seen and felt.

The organization of believers is necessary to prevent confusion. It provides leadership and augments growth. The need for organization is evident in Acts 6 with the selecting of workers and in Acts 13 in the sending forth of the first missionaries. There is to be a vital link between global ministry and Local Church direction.

C.S. Lewis notes how believers are to live in community and not as independent and isolated entities.

God can show Himself as He really is only to real men. And that means not simply to men who are individually good, but to men who are united together in a body, loving one another, helping one another, showing Him to one another. For that is what God meant humanity to be like; like

players in one band, or organs in one body. Consequently, the one really adequate instrument for learning about God, is the whole Christian community, waiting for Him together.⁴

We must guard ourselves against our rebellious self that makes everything about us. It is in the strength of the community that we find deliverance from our egocentric existence.

B. The Local Church is necessary in providing proper fellowship for believers (Heb. 10:25).

...not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near (Heb. 10:25).

It is extremely important that new Christians (all Christians) have good fellowship. The Church provides this. In good fellowship, believers receive . . .

1. mutual **encouragement** (Rom. 1:12),
2. mutual **edification** (1 Cor. 12:14-27; 14:12)
3. The sharing of **joys** and **burdens** (Gal. 6:2)

It is as I am identified with the people of God and the God of the people that others see me as a Christian (John 13:34, 35).

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34, 35).

C. The Local Church is necessary for the teaching of believers (Eph. 4:11, 12).

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11, 12).

A good church provides needed training and teaching so Christians can grow in their own spiritual lives and minister to others. There are three reasons noted in Ephesians 4:11 and 12 as to why God gave the

Church the gift of teacher/teaching.

1. The saints might be perfected

The purpose of instruction is for the saints to get along and work smoothly together.

2. The ministry might be accomplished

The idea is not that of an office, but of ministering. It is equipping the saint for servant-hood, for a life of discipleship, for ministering to others.

3. The body might be built

The word “edifying” is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 14:12. The purpose of teaching is that the body might be built. Growth is to be the natural consequence of study. The primary teacher must always be the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20, 27). God has given gifted men to the church, but they must never take the place of the Holy Spirit in the life of individual believers.

D. The Local Church is necessary in providing an opportunity for group worship

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight (Acts 20:7).

On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come (1 Cor. 16:2).

²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near (Heb. 10:24, 25).

With many of these ideas there are no direct or specific verses, but the overwhelming “flavor” of the New Testament is for His people to regularly gather for the purpose of worshiping God. Worship is to be

both personal and public. Group worship, singing, and praise are both honoring to God and helpful to our growth. Corporate worship is a public declaration of private devotion.

E. The Local Church is necessary in providing us an opportunity for service

The church provides us with a place where we can use the gifts God has given us. This is seen in 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Peter 4:10. This idea is also supported with the many “one another” verses throughout the New Testament.



Why Should I be Identified with a Local Church?

This is a valid question. The thought is one of association. Rick Warren in his work, The Purpose Driven Life says, “You are called to belong, not just believe.”⁵ The “why” of identification is wrapped around the “why” of existence.

A. You should identify yourself with a Local Church for organizational reasons (1 Cor. 14:33).

The Local Church is to be the most efficient and effective means of ministering to the largest group of people possible. It is through His people that He will build His church. The Local Church is a means of Him ministering to His people hope, healing, and wholeness.

B. You should identify yourself with a Local Church for fellowship (Heb. 10:25).

God’s ongoing ministry in you and through you is for His people around you.

C. You should identify yourself with a Local Church for systematic and intentional instruction (Eph. 4:11, 12).

It is through the systematic and intentional instruction of the Local Church that God will protect His people from error and unscrupulous spiritual mercenaries. The Local Church and its Elder led leadership provide a system of checks and balances in the handling and ministering of God’s Word. The Elders of this fellowship are, in many ways, the

gatekeepers.

D. You should identify yourself with a Local Church for corporate worship

There is something special when the people of God gather for corporate worship. I believe this is intentional and intrinsic.

E. You should identify yourself with a Local Church for ministry opportunity

You have been gifted by God. You are special to the overall expression of Christ in and through His people for the edification of His people and for the evangelization of those who are yet to come. The local assembly needs your giftedness. You are His gift to fellow believers.

F. You should identify yourself with a Local Church because no one is an island unto himself or herself

Christians are built for community. Humanity's default setting is self-centeredness. We are, by nature, creatures of self-interest. Identifying ourselves with a Local Church places us in a context of self-sacrificing love. Remember the work entitled, "For Whom the Bell Tolls?"

*No man is an island, entire of itself
every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main
if a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less, as well as if a [peninsula] were,
as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were
any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind
and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls
it tolls for thee.⁶*

As a fellowship, we are part of one another. If God should in His providence lead you away from your Local Church family, please by all means possible and necessary find another fellowship as soon as possible and become identified by it, united with it, and loyal to it.



Why Should I Join a Local Church?

Perhaps the better question is, “Why not join a local church?” Before considering that question, let us address our initial question. The Local Church has done a disservice to the body by making membership something other than what God intended. It is not admittance into a society with archaic passwords and secret handshakes. It is not about the church owning you. It is not the abandoning of individual identity or freethinking. It is not going back into bondage, the forsaking of Christ-like liberty and freedom. Membership is not going back under the “law.” Membership is not a criterion for spirituality, nor is it a means of dividing the people of God. You are no more or less spiritual because of membership. Membership as we know it is not taught in the Bible. However, before we start getting too excited, neither is our order of service, how we receive an offering, a children or youth ministry or a host of other things. Things like membership simply help us in carrying out the ministry entrusted to us by God during this era in church history.

But let us ask the question, “What is membership?” Membership, when properly practiced, identifies those who have publicly said, “This is my church.” Membership says, “I believe privately what this local assembly proclaims publicly.” Membership says, “You can count me in.” It says, “I will throw in my lot with those whose sole passion is to exalt Christ.” Membership says, “I desire to be a part of something that is bigger than me. I want to take the message of Christ and Grace to every tongue, tribe, people, and nation.” Membership might say more than this, but it does not say less.

The Church is to be a vital part of the Christian growth process and the marriage relationship. The Church assists in strengthening, protecting and establishing marriages. The local church can provide:

1. Instruction: Through the systematic study of Scripture our minds are renewed. We are married the day of our wedding but learning to be the husband or wife God intends us to be is a life long process. Instruction in the Word is of great value in aligning our thinking with God’s mind.
2. Accountability: Identifying with a local church enables people to develop honest and transparent relationships with other believers. Such friendships provide encouragement in trying times and exhortation when needed.
3. Celebration: Our culture no longer celebrates longevity of marriage. Hollywood makes marriage look like a disposable

commodity. No fault divorce has made ending a marriage easy. Marriage is to be celebrated and the local church values and supports the marriage covenant.

4. Perspective/Purpose: Our own personal happiness is secondary to God's eternal purposes. He has built His Church to further His program and all believers are part of this plan. When both husband and wife are seeking Christ first and foremost, the marriage relationship is strengthened.

This list is not exhaustive but only a sample of the importance of identifying with a local fellowship. The Church is vital to a strong healthy growing marriage. Do not forsake her.



APPLICATION (Making the Transfer)

Please turn with me to Hebrews 10:19-25.

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **let us** draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. **Let us** hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and **let us** consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, **not forsaking our own assembling together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near (Heb. 10:19-23).

The Old Testament sacrificial system was only a “shadow” of the good things to come (v.1). The inherent limitations of the Old Testament sacrificial system reminded the worshipper every year of their sin (v.3). Their inherent limitations made it impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (v.4). The temporal nature of the sacrifice demanded daily repeating and its temporal nature prohibited it from taking away sins (v.11).

It is because of what precedes that, “we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus” (v.19). The author of Hebrews summarizes His preceding thoughts with three exhortations.

- Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith (v.22).
- Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering (v.23).
- Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works (v.24).

What does a sufficient sacrifice look like for the sins of His people? It looks like verses 22 through 24. The people of God draw near, hold fast, and stir up because Jesus “opened up for them the partition that existed between them and their heavenly Father” (v.20). Where are these activities to be taking place? They are to be a real part of any Local Church assembly. We are here to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. We are here to encourage one another to hold fast and to draw near. The Local Church is to be a part of our identity, unity, and loyalty.

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¹ This ABCNEWS/Beliefnet poll was conducted by telephone Feb. 19-20, [2004] among a random national sample of 1,008 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Fieldwork was conducted by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

² <http://www.answers.com/topic/cornerstone>

³ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God’s Narrative* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2008), 180, 181.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Collier Books, 1943), 144.

⁵ Rick Warren in his work, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 130.

⁶ John Donne (1572-1631), from *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, Meditation XVII