

# THE LOCAL CHURCH

After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, those who had been saved by faith from the hell they deserve started attending local assemblies of believers, devoting themselves to these local churches and the authority of the **apostles** as shepherds. They were later replaced by **elders**, men with the teaching gifts of pastor and evangelist (Acts 2:41-42; Eph. 4:8, 11-13; 1 Tim. 3:2). God has given these gifted men to the church to equip and train the saints for the work of service. Attending a local church does not make a person a Christian, but it is God's revealed plan for the Christian so that he may grow and mature in the knowledge of his Lord and Savior.

**Acts 2:42-46** *They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all **those who had believed were together** and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day **continuing with one mind** in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together **with gladness and sincerity of heart**,*

## THE LOCAL CHURCH

A Christian cannot properly worship God without being part of a local assembly. The local assembly is God's plan, not man's (Matt. 16:18). "Home" (one or two families—no elder) churches, Bible studies, para-church organizations, religious radio or television programs, and Christian colleges or seminaries are no substitute for the local church. A Christian who refuses to worship in a local church, under the authority of **elders** (men with the teaching gifts of pastor or evangelist), is violating the Scriptures (Eph. 4:11-12) and is practicing sin, and Christians practicing sin will not inherit the kingdom of God and Christ (I Cor. 3:15, 6:9-10, II Cor. 5:10, Gal. 5:21, Eph. 5:5, Col. 3:23-25). Heaven is a free gift, but inheriting the kingdom is not free. The inheritance is the reward for faithful, hard-working, obedient Christians.

## WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT HIS CHURCH

**MAT 16:16-19** *"Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and **upon this rock I will build My church**; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. [Not upon Peter, but upon his confession of faith in Christ]. I will give **you** [apostles] the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever **you** bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever **you** loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."*

**MAT 18:18-20** *"Truly I say to **you** [apostles], whatever **you** bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever **you** loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again I say to **you** [apostles], that if **two of you** agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where **two or three** [apostles] have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."* (This is Jesus' promise to His apostles of special revelation and authority as needed during the completion of the New Testament)

**JOH 21:16** "He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, '**Shepherd My sheep.**'"

In the previous verses Jesus makes it clear that it is His church that He is establishing -- with men in authority -- and that His sheep will need men who are (elders) **shepherds**.

## **SHEPHERD/LEADERS IN THE FIRST CHURCHES**

**ACT 2:41-42** "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added [to the church] about three thousand souls. They were continually **devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching** and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

**ACT 11:22** "And the news about them reached the ears of the **church at Jerusalem**, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch."

**ACT 11:30** "And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to **the elders**."

**ACT 13:1** "Now there were at Antioch, **in the church that was there**, [elders] **prophets and teachers**: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul."

**ACT 14:23** "And when they had **appointed elders for them in every church**, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."

The above verses show that the early church in Jerusalem had leaders who were referred to as **apostles** and **elders** (prophets and teachers) and that these authorities appointed other men as **elders** in all the local assemblies, that is, in "**every church**."

## **APOSTLES AND ELDERS WORKING TOGETHER**

**ACT 15:2** "And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem **to the apostles and elders** concerning this issue."

**ACT 15:4** "And when they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received **by the church and the apostles and the elders**, and they reported all that God had done with them."

**ACT 15:6** "And the **apostles and the elders** came together to look into this matter."

**ACT 15:22-23** "Then it seemed good to **the apostles and the elders**, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas-- Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, and they sent this letter by them, 'The **apostles and the brethren who are elders**, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia....'"

**ACT 16:4** "Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees, which had been decided upon by the **apostles and elders** who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe."

**ACT 20:17** "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him **the elders of the church**."

**ACT 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."

**ACT 21:18** "And now the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the **elders** were present."

## **THE ELDERS' GIFTS AND THEIR PURPOSE**

**Eph. 4:11-13** "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; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." (Apostles and prophets ceased with the completion of the New Testament, I Cor 13:8-10)

It has never been God's plan for the saints to "equip" themselves. **Elders** are the gifted men for the "equipping of the saints." The letters to Timothy and Titus give the qualifications for "**elders**,"

**1 TIM 3:1-7** "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to **the office of overseer** [elder], it is a fine work he desires to do. An

overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, **able to teach**, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He [the elder] must be one who **manages his** own household well, keeping **his** children [those living at home] under control with all dignity. But if a man does not know how to **manage his own household**, how will **he take care of the church of God?**” And not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. [No minimum age, but spiritually mature]

**1 TIM 3:15** "... but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to **conduct himself in the household of God**, which is **the church** of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth."

**1 TIM 5:17** "The **elders who rule well** are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially **those** [elders] **who work hard at preaching and teaching.**"

**TIT 1:5-11** "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and **appoint elders in every city** as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe [disciples--believer children], not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the **overseer** [elder] must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the **teaching**, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."

## **ELDERS AND FALSE TEACHERS**

God, through the apostle Paul, instructs Timothy and Titus to "appoint" qualified men to the "office" of "overseer"--the **elder**, to establish proper "**conduct**" and **elder leadership** in the churches in "**every city.**" These elders would also need to be able to "exhort in sound doctrine and refute those" self-appointed, unqualified

teachers who were “upsetting whole families!” There may even be the need to “reprove them severely,” Tit.1:13.

**1 TIM 1:3, 6-7** *“As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may **instruct certain men not to teach** strange doctrines, For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, **wanting to be teachers** of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.*

**TIT 1:10-11** *For there are many **rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers**, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are **upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach** for the sake of sordid gain.*

## **RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SHEEP**

The following Bible verses remind Christians of the high priority they are to place on the weekly worship, teaching, prayer, and witnessing times established by their church, submitting to those **shepherds** (elders) that God has placed in that position of authority over them.

**HEB 10:25** *"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 13:7** *“Remember **those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you**; and considering the result of their conduct, **imitate their faith.**”*

**HEB 13:17** *"Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."*

## **"ELDERS IN EVERY CHURCH"**

The next verses reveal that even though many of the early churches met in homes, there were not just one or two families with no elder

meeting as a church. The believers of the city had placed themselves under the authority of the elders established in that city,

**ROM 16:1** *"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of **the church** which is at Cenchrea..."*

**ROM 16:5** *"...also greet **the church that is in their house** ...."*

**1CO 1:2** *"...to **the church** of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling..."*

**1CO 4:17** *"For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach **everywhere in every church**."*

**1CO 16:19** *"The **churches** of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with **the church** that is in their house."*

**COL 4:15-16** *"Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and **the church** that is in her house. And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in **the church** of the Laodiceans..."*

**1TH 1:1** *"Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to **the church** of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ..."*

**PHM 1:2** *"...and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to **the church** in your house..."*

## **ELDER -- OVERSEER AUTHORITY**

**1TI 5:17** *"Let the **elders** who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."*

**JAM 5:14** *"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for **the elders** of the church, and let **them** pray over him..."*

**1PE 5:1-2** *"...therefore, I exhort **the elders** among you, as your **fellow elder** and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, **shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight** ..."*

**1PE 5:5** *"You younger men, likewise, **be subject to your elders**; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

## JESUS' FINAL WORDS TO THE LOCAL CHURCHES

**Revelation 1:11** saying, *“Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven [local] churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”*

Our Lord Jesus commanded John to send the Revelation to the **elders** or messengers (Gk. *angelos*) of specific local churches, also rebuking or praising them concerning their churches. (It wouldn't make sense for John to write a letter to literal "angels," since **elders are the ones responsible** for the churches),

**REV 2:1** *"To the **angel** [elder] **of the church** in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand..."*

**REV 2:8** *"And to the **angel** [elder] **of the church** in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life ..."*

**REV 2:18** *"And to the **angel** [elder] **of the church** in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire..."*

**REV 3:1** *"And to the **angel** [elder] **of the church** in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars ..."*

**REV 3:7** *"And to the **angel** [elder] **of the church** in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David..."*

**REV 3:14** *"And to the **angel** [elder] **of the church** in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this..."*

Do you believe that you will always deserve to be in hell, and that Jesus Christ (God in flesh) died on the cross, suffered in hell, and resurrected in your place to purchase for you the free gift of eternal life to save you forever from the hell that you deserve? Have you been born again? Do you know for sure that you have eternal life? If your answers are “yes,” and you want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in return for the great love that He has shown you, you need to be in a local church that will provide the *Biblical* teaching, fellowship, encouragement, training, and leadership you will need in order to be a faithful, mature Christian.

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