

WHAT ARE THE MOST PRESSING NEEDS OF THE LOCAL CONGREGATION?

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INTRODUCTION:

There are many people today who have received God as their Father, love Jesus, and mistakenly think that they can grow spiritually without having to make any formal connection with the local church. While all of these things are wonderful tools that can supplement our spiritual development, none of them can replace God's purpose for the local church (***Eph. 3:10-11***).

In many cases they are under the misguided belief that since the New Testament teaches the authority and priesthood of the believer, it is unnecessary to emphasize any special "class" of ministerial authority. While it is certainly true that every believer is priest unto God (***1 Peter 2:9***), Jesus never intended His church to do away with spiritual authority. In fact Jesus spent 3 and a half years training His disciples for His Church, and Paul clearly understood that a biblical church required human leadership by specially called and gifted ministers (***Eph.4:11-12***).

Naturally, as leaders of the church, we who occupy that position of special calling are to passionately preach God's purposes for His Church while maintaining the attitude of a servant. After all, biblical leadership *is* servant hood (***Matt. 23:11***).

The Lord designed the church as a distribution system. There are many things that Jesus distributes to His people exclusively through the local church. The Lord intended for us to live the transformed life in community together. Knowing the purposes God intends for us in the local church enables us to receive them. Let's look at some of these purposes.

EXPERIENCING THE SPECIAL PRESENCE OF JESUS

When Jesus began teaching about the purpose of His church, He made this statement: "*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them*" - (***Matthew 18:20***).

Throughout the Scripture, whenever God's people would gather to worship, God promised a special manifestation of His presence. This is known as the *corporate presence of God*.

While the Lord is present inside of each of His children, when we come together to worship as a church, He is present in an even greater way. All throughout the Bible, when God's people came together in His name, powerful things occurred. The miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:1-4**), or the sudden healing of a lame man (**Acts 14:8-10**), the record shows that the Lord longs to manifest special blessings on His gathered people.

When you come to church, expect the Lord to manifest His presence. Know that regardless of what you may feel emotionally or physically, Jesus is there in a special way. Often it is your presence in church and participation in worship by faith that sets the environment for the Holy Spirit to move in the service. He is present to minister to the needs of His family, so attending worship services is a selfless way in which your presence helps to create the environment God uses to move in the lives of *others*.

"Together, we are his house...We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord...being made part of this dwelling where God lives by His Spirit" (**Ephesians 2:20-22**).

TO MAKE DISCIPLES BY TEACHING GOD'S WORD

"All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). "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, 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. (**Matt. 28:19-20**).

Every believer needs to regularly hear the teaching and preaching of God's Word in order to develop in faith and grow to spiritual maturity.

Paul told us to be *"transformed by the renewing of your mind"* (**Romans 12:2, Rom. 10:17**). When the Lord Jesus left the earth, He appointed Persons to lead His church. *"And He himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints in the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ"* (**Ephesians 4:11-12**).

The primary way these ministers lead the church is through sound preaching and teaching in a local Church. If the ministers of the church are Christ's gifts to us, then we need to receive them in order to reach our potential and fulfill our purpose. There is a difference between reading the Bible on your own and hearing sound teaching of God's Word through the Elders and ministers of the church. When the church gathers to hear God's Word, the Holy Spirit speaks through them to equip God's people to transform their lives.

INCREASES OUR FAITH: Paul taught that *"faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (**Rom. 10:17**). Paul was teaching that we need to be present to hear the inspired message of the preacher (**Romans 10:14-15**). When we gather to hear a sermon each week, the Holy Spirit works through the gifts in the pastor to inspire our faith. Strong faith is essential to pleasing God (**Hebrews 11:6**), receiving answers to our prayers (**James 1:6-7**), and living a victorious Christian life (**1 John 5:4**).

ENABLES SPIRITUAL GROWTH

“As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).

Just like a newborn requires the proper diet in order to grow physically, our spirits need the “milk” of God’s Word in order to develop into maturity.

RENEWS OUR MINDS

Sound teaching and preaching can often help us to change our thinking and renew our minds faster than private Bible study alone. The Holy Spirit guides the Preacher to Minister God’s word in such a way that it takes deep root in our hearts and minds. The more we hear the preaching of the Word, the more our minds are strengthened in new and better patterns of thinking. Preaching and teaching uproots worldly thinking and replaces wrong and self-destructive thoughts with the inspired revelation of God’s Word. Paul told the Corinthians that when he arrived to preach he was going to “cast down” their unhealthy mental strongholds and take every wrong thought into “captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cort. 10:5). This process is critical to our growth.

CORRECTS AND PROTECTS US

Timothy was a young Preacher of a local church in Ephesus. Paul wrote Timothy two letters instructing him how to lead the church effectively. Much of what Paul told Timothy had to do with His teaching and preaching ministry. Paul wrote: “Preach the Word! Keep your sense of urgency [stand by, be at hand and ready], whether the opportunity seems to be favorable or unfavorable. [Whether it is convenient or inconvenient, whether it is welcome or unwelcome, you as preacher of the Word are to show people in what way their lives are wrong.]

And convince them, rebuking and correcting, warning and urging and encouraging them, being unflagging and inexhaustible in patience and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2). The Preacher needs to do more than encourage us. It is also the Preacher’s responsibility to correct and warn us. When God speaks correction through the Preacher, He is actually protecting us from error and deception (Ephesians 4:14).

PROVIDES GUIDANCE AND NEEDED INSPIRATION

In the Spirit-filled local church, God often speaks through the Preacher’s message to address hidden problems or prepare the church for future events. Sometimes the Preacher will find himself saying something he did not plan to say. Often the Preacher will not know why he is being directed to say things in his message. Later it becomes clear that the Holy Spirit was using the Preacher to speak to issues in the congregation or future events that are beyond the scope of the Preacher’s knowledge. This is a sign that God loves His people enough to speak personally to a room full of different people at the same time!

NOT EVERY PREACHER OR TEACHER IS USED IN THE SAME WAY: However, every Preacher who is sincere and truly converted by the Lord will be inspired to teach and preach God’s Word in a way that will apply to the needs of the moment, while often preparing the church for things to come as well. By faithfully attending church and listening carefully to the messages that are preached, you will often discover that God is speaking into your life and preparing you for the challenges that lie just ahead.

Many times we leave church, thinking the message was probably for someone else, only to discover later that week that God was speaking directly to us. Thank God for the supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Word of God.

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32).

CONCLUSION:

Every member of the body of Christ needs the spiritual covering of the local church. This “covering” is like a shelter in the midst of a world that is filled with deception, temptation, and demonic activity. There is a supernatural grace that connects members of the local church to each other and their Elders and Preachers. Regardless of how long you have been a Christian or how gifted you may be, a believer should always seek to operate under the safety of a spiritual covering in the local church.